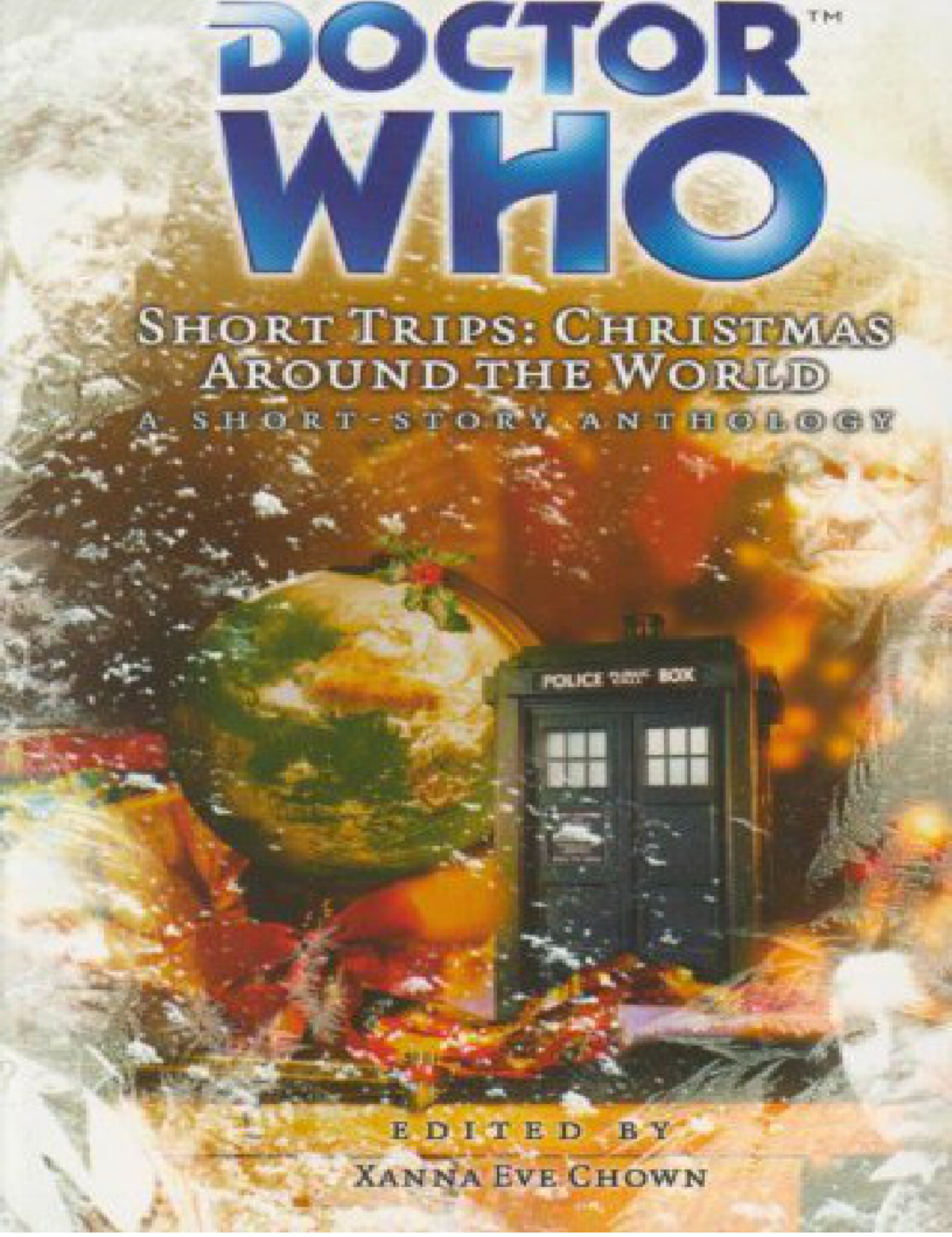
DOCTOR WHO™

SHORT TRIPS: CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

A SHORT-STORY ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY

XANNA EVE CHOWN

SHORT TRIPS:

CHRISTMAS A R O U N D

THE W O R L D

A Short-Story Anthology

Edited by Xanna Eve Chown

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For *Jasper*

Happy first Christmas

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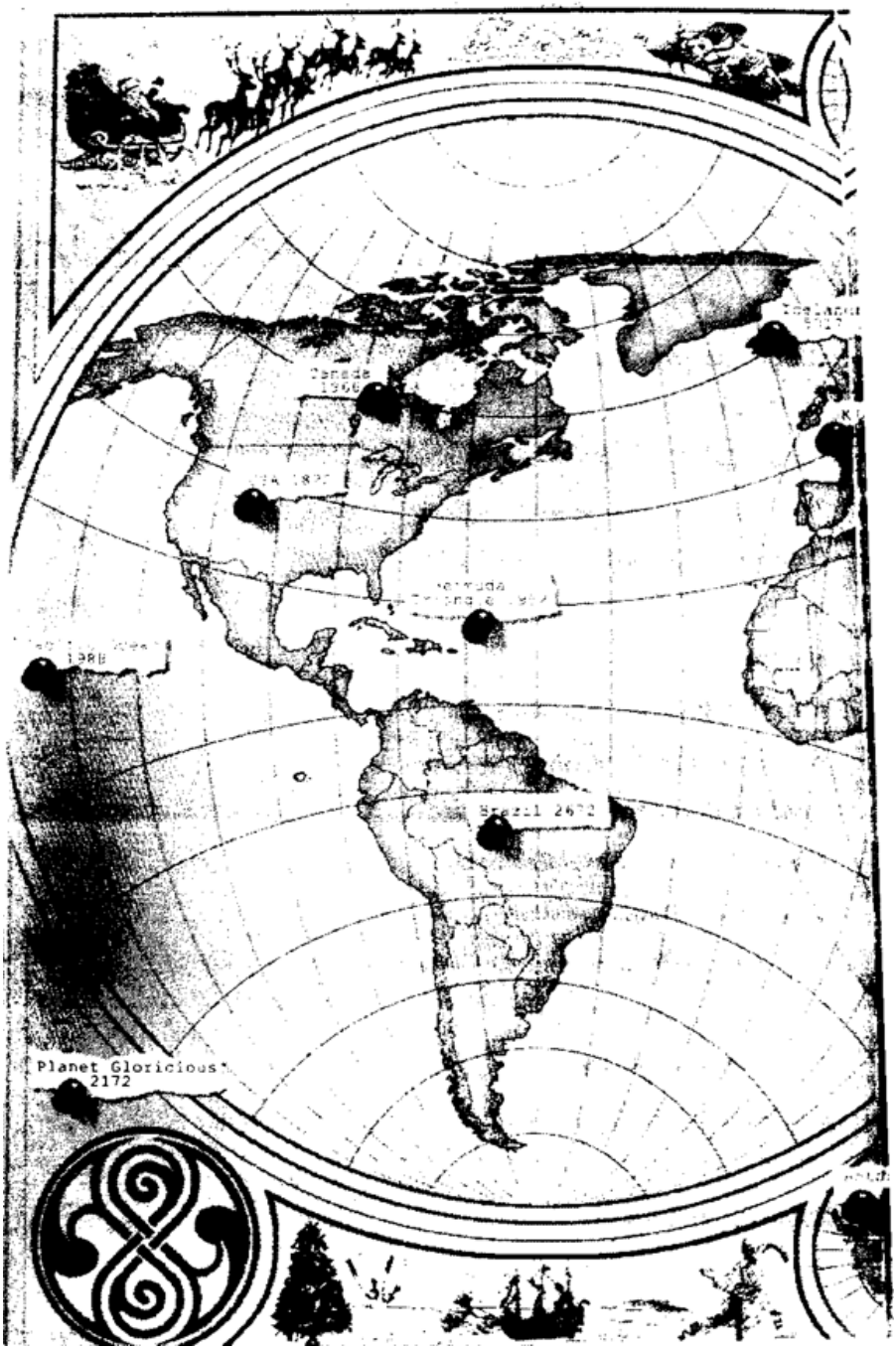
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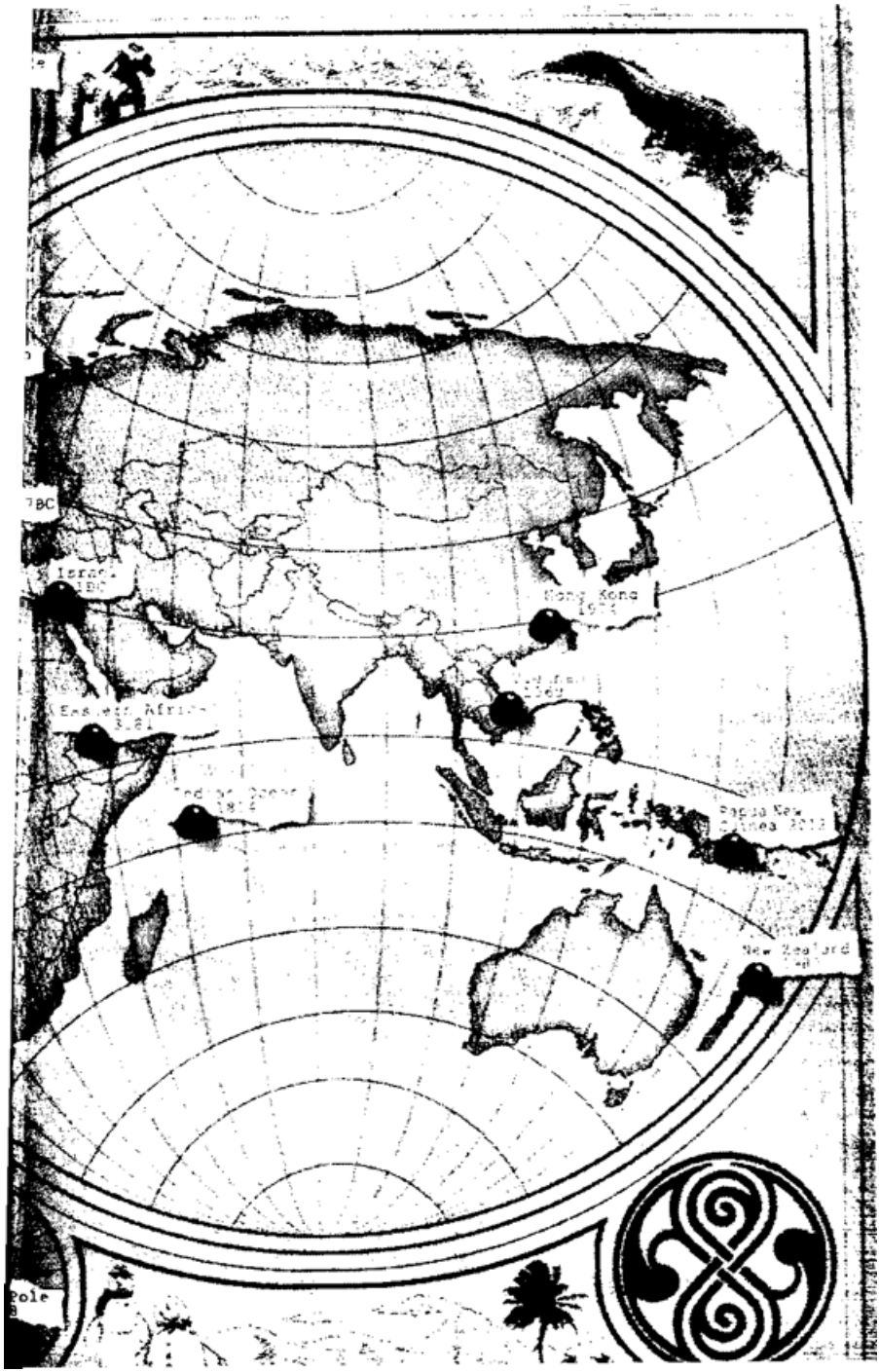
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The Canadian postal authority has assigned postal code HoH oHo to the North Pole.

North Pole 2009

Planet of the Elves

John Binns

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Adric

The TARDIS's third bedroom was warm, quiet and comfortable, just as the

Doctor had promised; but still, Adric was finding it practically impossible

to sleep.

It wasn't that he didn't appreciate the Doctor's efforts to impose an

approximate structure on their days, roughly 16 hours of waking time

followed by eight hours' rest, which wasn't exactly easy in a Time/Space

travel machine. It would certainly be reasonable to expect Adric to be

fatigued after the few days, packed with incident, since he had secreted

himself aboard the ship. But the Alzarian's energy levels were higher than

most and, for the third night in a row, he found himself spending very

little time actually sleeping in his new bedroom, and much of the night

ploughing his way through the Doctor's eclectic book collection instead.

Adric had spent a fair amount of time in the TARDIS library since he'd

arrived, keen to learn as much as he could about the universe the Doctor

and Romana had come from - and, since they'd left Romana and *K~g* at

the Gateway, to allow the Doctor a little privacy. In the last couple of days

the Time Lord had taken to mooching around the TARDIS corridors,

emptying out cupboards and rearranging furniture, as if trying to distract

himself from the fact that they had left their friends behind.

For his part, Adric had tried his best to hide his impatience at having

arrived in N-Space but not yet touched down on any planet. Yesterday

though, he'd managed to secure a promise that they would land somewhere

today. Consequently, this morning he had woken early after a few hours'

sleep with a palpable feeling of anticipation, even excitement. Finally, he

would set foot on alien territory in a whole new universe.

Coming to the end of a long tome on thermal physics, Adric resolved to

see whether the Doctor was awake yet. He got up from his bed and pulled

the door open. The TARDIS lighting was dimmed, as if to simulate dawn.

He padded lightly down the corridor in his stockinged feet, shivering a

little in his pyjamas.

The unmistakeable sound of harrumphing and boxes being thrown

about alerted Adric as he neared the console room that the Doctor was

indeed awake, but still he managed to be surprised, when he turned the

corner, at the extent of the chaos the Time Lord had created. Piled high

on the central console were dozens of books, boxes, bundles of papers,

general assorted bric-a-brac; whilst propped up against the far wall was

a gigantic sack, no doubt containing more of the same. The Time Lord

stood with his long red coat and his hat, as if ready to leave the ship at a

moment's notice, poring over a pile of papers and photographs.

'Hello,' the boy said, feeling a little as if he was intruding on the Doctor's

space, but unwilling to slink back to his bedroom nevertheless.

'Adric! Good morning,' the Doctor said, with only the slightest glimmer

of a smile. 'Good to see you're up so early. Perhaps you can help me with

some of this...' With a broad sweep of his hand he vaguely indicated the

detritus on the console. 'Just keeping up with the old filing, you know.'

Adric nodded dutifully, but thought to himself that there was likely to be

nothing ordered or systematic about this exercise. It looked as if he had

just started emptying the sack out onto the console.

'It's amazing what one finds in a really thorough clearing-out,' the

Doctor said. 'Look at these, for instance.' He brandished what looked at

first like an unimpressive-looking object, a glass cylinder shaped vaguely

like an hourglass. He began to turn it, and before Adric knew it the Time

Lord had vanished and instantly reappeared on the other side of the

room.

'Chronological damper. Neat, isn't it?' he said.

'It's amazing,' the boy said honestly, and made the mistake of asking

about the other objects the Doctor had placed on the console next to him.

'Oh, these are just as good,' the Doctor said, and started handing them

to Adric one by one: a small pencil; an oversized gas mask; a piece of fruit.

He tried to look impressed as he handed them back. The Doctor stuffed

them all into his pockets. 'Perhaps you can help me go through the sack.'

'I'll do my best,' Adric replied, a little hesitantly, and on the Doctor's

cue began looking through the contents, trying at least to sort them by

format. There seemed to be a lot of photographs, some with the Doctor,

most not; papers; books; and a variety of electronic storage media. After a

few moments he came across a data disk in some sort of plastic container,

and asked the Doctor with help on where to file it.

'Good lord,' the Doctor said. 'Now, I wondered where that had got to.

We ought to have a look at this, you know.' He snatched the container from

Adric's hands and started looking over the console panel, presumably for

a slot to play it.

'What is it?' said Adric.

'It's a digital video disk,' said the Doctor. 'Something I picked up on my

travels at some point, which I thought might need investigating... Aha.' He

found a slot, and inserted the disk.

'What's so special about it?' Adric asked.

'Well, for all I know, absolutely nothing,' the Doctor said, 'but it's as

well to be sure about these things. So often of course something like this

is just lying around when one's busy with other things, and there so often

isn't time to follow every lead.'

'And so it gets filed away?' Adric said brightly. The Doctor gave him a

disapproving look.

'Let's just watch it, shall we?'

Adric nodded, and turned his eyes to the screen. The video, if he was

honest, was completely baffling to him: a succession of images that seemed

both mythic and domestic; a voiceover that promised a commercial service

of some kind, but one Adric couldn't even begin to understand.

'At long *last,'* the voice said, 'the customers *of* the Christmas Corporation can make the *magic of* the season *genuinely come* true for their young children. Next time, when you tell them that Santa *will deliver their gifts* on Christmas Eve, you can rest assured that your promise will be *fulfilled.'*

The images that accompanied this part of the video were of children, all

humanoids, not many years old, getting up from their beds and going into

rooms where their parents (Adric assumed) greeted them warmly. Without

exception the rooms were decorated lavishly, with sparkling colours and

soft lights, and all - rather oddly, Adric thought - with a gigantic tree

standing in one comer.

The children were shown opening boxes and taking out various objects

that seemed to bring them pleasure: small simulated vehicles; soft, stylised

animal figures; electronic gadgets. The parents seemed to be looking on

with pleasure, and perhaps pride; but had the objects come from them, or

from somewhere else? The next part was even more baffling.

'For an easy-to-administer monthly *fee,* you can customise your children's

Christmas lists and leave the rest of the process up to us: we'll package, purchase, and

even produce just the gifts they want- and deserve,' the voice said. 'And as you'll see

here, our facilities are exactly what you'd expect from this particular service.'

The images showed small, green creatures in pointed hats, hard at work

packaging the children's gifts into brightly coloured boxes, then shipping

them out in motorised vehicles across a snowy landscape. At this point

Adric caught a glimpse of the Doctor running his hand through his hair,

deep in thought: this part of the video was bothering him.

'For an additional fee, we'll even make sure your children get the authentic

Christmas deal - all the gifts they want, or maybe just a few, depending on whether

they're naughty or nice.' The images here were a little more sinister, hidden

cameras in the children's bedrooms recording an ill-natured fight between

a young boy and a girl, presumably his sister.

'And of course, if they're especially good - and especially lucky - they might just

catch a glimpse of the man himself Here the same children were looking out

of the window, and there was a sound of bells - then the image cut to a

strange-looking chariot being driven across the sky by beasts of burden, in

it a white-bearded man in a long red coat, laughing.

'Wherever you live, whatever your traditions, we'll make sure the service is

tailored to you.' A series of quick-fire images flashed up, with captions.

MEXICO: a young girl leaving a note in her shoes; EASTERN EUROPE:

a chariot, similar to the one seen earlier, but now with a young woman

accompanying the old man as a helper'; THE NETHERLANDS: the same

man with a tall hat and a crooked staff, now accompanied by an impish

figure and standing on the deck of a steam-powered marine vessel.

The video closed with a scroll of dense text, apparently giving several

options for the service being provided. Following that were several more

images of the small green figures in their factory, accompanied by jovial

music; and the name of the company producing it.

'Well, I don't really follow...' Adric started to admit, but already the

Doctor was pushing his supposed 'filing' haphazardly from the console.

'I thought there was something odd about it,' the Doctor said almost

triumphantly as he set the controls. 'But almost anyone else seeing that

footage would assume those factory pictures were faked. I don't suppose

anyone stopped to think there were actual creatures being exploited for

their convenience.'

Adric supposed he was at least starting to get the message. 'So we're

going to stop them,' he said. 'But how do we know where the factory is?'

The Doctor brandished the plastic box from which the disk had come,

pointing Adric to some text on the back. FILMED AND MANUFACTURED

AT THE CHRISTMAS CORPORATION HQ, NORTH POLE, it said. And

then a symbol: © CHRISTMAS CORPORATION, 2009.

Adric supposed he wasn't in the mood to give explanations, at least not

right at the moment. But he felt at least one question was warranted.

'Doctor, what's "Christmas"?'

The Doctor stopped in his tracks for a moment and gave a small smile,

as if recalling something fondly. 'I'll be delighted to show you,' he said.

The TARDIS had landed in a larged domed chamber, filled with glittering

lights and strongly scented with unfamiliar herbs and spices. As he

stepped from the ship, Adric's overwhelming impression was of opulence

and goodwill. The room was deserted, but its centrepiece remained on

view: the flying chariot and, in front of it, half a dozen creatures, docile-

looking and antlered, staring dully straight ahead. A closer look told Adric

they were actually robotic. Oddly, the one at the front seemed to have a

red-filtered lamp fitted into its snout.

'Reindeer,' said the Doctor.

Adric nodded dumbly.

The whole room seemed designed to impress, and it did the job. As if

the glitter and sparkle inside the room weren't enough, a large window on

one wall showed a spectacular vista of gleaming-white snow and raging

blizzards, which Adric inferred was the frozen surface of an ice planet.

'Well, this...' The Alzarian was lost for words for a minute, but settled

on: 'This is amazing!' He beamed at his companion, realising he actually

meant it. It may not have been what he had expected to find on his

first

planet in N-Space, but it was certainly alien enough.

The Doctor frowned a little. 'Well, yes, it's Christmas,' he responded guardedly, and started walking around the perimeter of the room. 'But there's something not quite right, I'm afraid. Have a mince pie.' He gestured towards a table next to the chariot, upon which were two objects on a plate. Adric took the more appetising-looking one, a thin orange vegetable, and crunched it greedily.

'It's good,' he said between mouthfuls.

The Doctor frowned at him and continued his search around the walls.

'What I don't understand,' said Adric, following close behind the Doctor with an effort, 'is why it would be such a bad thing for this - "corporation"?' The Doctor nodded. 'To organise this business of giving presents to children on the festival day, and checking to see if they're well behaved, if that's what the children have been told will happen. If anything, I would have thought it was better if they're told this Father Christmas character delivers the gifts, that the corporation stands in for him rather than the parents. It seems like a more sensible way to organise things, doesn't it?'

The Doctor gave Adric a pained expression, as if he despaired that the boy would ever understand. 'No, no,' he said, 'that's not the point of it at all, Adric. Young children need to believe in this figure their parents

tell them about, but it's just as important that the stories aren't true,

especially the part about someone being able to see whether you've been

good all year. This idea turns generations of cultural tradition into... well,

a contracted-out business exercise.'

Adric frowned. 'But if a whole cultural tradition is based on perpetuating

lies to generations of people, isn't that what we should be trying to stop?'

The Doctor shrugged that off. 'Well, a little cultural creativity never

harmed anyone,' he said. 'Aha!'

The Doctor had found a pair of doors, hidden in the glittering

multicoloured walls of the room. He pulled a concealed handle and they

parted, revealing what Adric would have called a wardrobe, if it hadn't

been almost the size of the console room. In it was a variety of clothing,

including several versions of the fur-lined coat they'd seen in the video.

'A dressing-up cupboard!' the Doctor exclaimed. 'This must be the

showroom, for particularly valued customers. Not that many of them

would be able to come all the way to the North Pole,' he added. 'But,' he

said to his companion, 'I suspect there's more to it than that. Those so-

called elves working in the factory didn't look like people dressed up to

me. Or robots for that matter. There's a definite hint of subjugation

here,

and something definitely beyond the realms of the indigenous population

at this point in their history.' He was holding his sonic screwdriver up

to the walls as he walked, until suddenly it began to emit a high-pitched

whine. 'Add to that the TARDIS's detection of space-warp technology in

the vicinity, and we have a story to uncover...' He reached a heavy-looking

door in one side ofthe room, and tapped it carefully. 'Yes, that's the one.'

He pressed the sonic screwdriver against the door, which slid open with a

hiss. Nervously, Adric followed the Time Lord as he stepped through.

The room behind the door was even larger than the showroom, an

open-plan factory floor on five circular levels, open in the centre, forming

a gigantic cylinder. Ramps connected the levels and Adric could see a thick

metal rail guarding the open middle circle.

On each floor, at Adric's estimate, there must have been 10 to 15 different

production lines, and a similar number of separate hubs with a handful of

desks and computer screens. The same scent of herbs and spices pervaded

the air, if anything even stronger than before. Dominating the enormous

wall on the opposite side from which they had entered, a vast thick

window

displayed the same snowy vista they had seen in the showroom.

'Have we been noticed, do you think?' the Doctor said.

Adric shook his head. At every production line and every desk sat the

diminutive, green-skinned humanoids he had seen on the video. Dressed

in pointed hats and striped overalls, they varied in gender and age, but only

the tallest of them approached Adric's height. They were all apparently

focused intently on the job in hand. Even those creatures at the long

workbench directly in front of the travellers (who seemed to be producing

some kind of sweet-smelling delicacy, then wrapping it in multicoloured

foil) had not registered their presence.

'Silostophans, I'd say,' the Doctor mused quietly. 'From the constellation

of Andromeda. That certainly fits, I'm afraid. Their planet was taken over

by some unscrupulous venture capitalists, round about...' He glanced

briefly at his watch. 'Well, round about now, in fact. This might be the

Andromedans' first attempt to exploit their labour, though it's odd they've

done it so far from home. I wonder.' He ran his fingers through his hair.

Adric looked around him.

'If anyone's going to notice us, I'd have thought they'd be in there,' he

said. He pointed to what looked like a small office on the floor above them.

As he watched, a small group of Silostophans were shuffling in through

the door, with the air of workers reporting to their foreman.

'Hmm. Then that's where we need to go,' the Doctor said.

'Do we just stroll in?' Adric asked.

'No, I don't think so,' the Doctor replied. 'I'd expect them to be a little

cagey about their operation, and besides, a little sneaking around can

sometimes work wonders.' He brandished his screwdriver again. 'Are you

up to a little jiggery-pokery with the computer? See if you can hack in?'

'Well, I can certainly try,' Adric said.

'Good. Then you'd better put some of those on.'

Adric followed the Doctor's gaze to a row of hooks on the wall behind

him, from which hung several sets of workers' overalls and hats - even, he

noted with alarm, their pointed little shoes.

Adric grimaced. 'You don't really...'

'I'm afraid so,' the Doctor nodded. 'We won't get into the office as we

are, and this way at least you can be inconspicuous.'

'But I don't...' Adric tried to protest that the clothes wouldn't fit, but

looking at them he realised that the largest size probably would. Slightly

dismayed at the course of his first adventure on an N-Space world, he

began pulling the clothes on. The shoes were the hardest to fit, and would

only go on after he'd taken off his socks and given them to the Doctor.

Upsettingly, though usefully for disguise purposes, the hat - intended for

a much wider, rounder-shaped head than Adric's own - came down to a

level just beneath his eyebrows.

The Doctor grinned. That's perfect,' he said. He handed him the

screwdriver, which Adric concealed within his sleeve.

'All right then,' the boy grumbled.

As inconspicuously as he could, Adric waited until the next group of

creatures in their part of the factory got up to go to the foreman's office.

There seemed to be three of them, each carrying a wooden object in his

(or her) claw-like hands - ready for inspection, no doubt. Adric grabbed

a similar object from the production line and followed behind them,

looking down at his feet.

He followed the group up the ramp and into the office, vaguely aware of

the Doctor's presence some distance behind him. When they reached the

plush, spacious office, he was surprised to see the old man from the video

standing behind the desk, wearing not just the long red coat of the 'Father

Christmas' character, but the long white beard as well. For some reason,

Adric had assumed the beard was fake. And why would he need to

wear the

costume of a fictional character in his own office?

His gaze wandered to the small wooden wedge on the old man's

cluttered desk. S. CLAUS, it read simply, MANAGING DIRECTOR.

The creatures in front of him began the process of handing over the

objects they had made. Mercifully, it seemed the creature in front would

be taking the lead and showing Mr Claus everything, so Adric could afford

to hang at the back behind the others. He was alarmed, after the creature

had finished explaining its work in a barely audible squeak, when the

managing director began a booming-voiced tirade about the shoddiness

of the creatures' work, wagging a finger across the desk at the workers.

Adric started looking around for a computer terminal he could access. It

looked like the only one was on the desk itself, so he had to wait until the

old man's recriminations against the lead creature brought him out from

behind it and into the centre of the room. He sidled behind the desk and

brought out the sonic screwdriver. As he set about the task of bypassing

the computer's protocols, he saw the Doctor appear in the doorway.

'Just what do you think you're doing?' the Time Lord said.

Both Adric and Mr Claus looked up with a start.

'And who are you to be asking that question?' asked the old man.

'That's beside the point,' the Doctor replied, unperturbed. 'The point is that I've chanced upon your little venture, so it's got to stop. From the looks ofit you're a few hundred light years from home, so I'll give you a lift back to Andromeda if you'll let me take these poor chaps home as well.'

The managing director seemed faintly amused by this. As Adric busied himself with the computer, he heard: 'The creatures are well fed, well looked after; they have good healthcare...' The gist seemed to be that he was an entrepreneur taking advantage of a business opportunity.

'Yes, but what's wrong with their minds, hmm?' The Doctor waved a hand in front of the lead worker's face; it was a few seconds before it responded with a start.

'I don't think that's any of your business,' the director said. 'Right. You lot, out of the office.' He gestured to the workers, who slowly made to shuffle out.

Adric put away the sonic screwdriver and stepped from behind the desk.

'Not you,' the director said, turning directly to face him. 'And lock the door on the way out,' he called to the creatures.

Adric and the Doctor both rushed towards the office door, but it was too late. The Doctor looked alarmed at the sound of it clunking into the locked position. The two of them turned to see the director, whose

pursed

lips - barely visible beneath the thick white beard - and fierce-looking eyes

belied a pure malevolence.

'I think the best I can do is put you two straight to work,' he boomed.

Too late, the Doctor moved towards him and Adric noticed the huge

empty sack the director had grabbed from behind the desk. He loomed

towards them menacingly and, in one movement, pulled it over their

heads. Almost before he knew it, Adric felt the lurching sensation of the

two of them being hauled round into an upside-down position.

'Oof,' Adric breathed, as he and the Doctor struggled uselessly. Inside

the sack, the scent of herbs and spices was at its strongest ever, and he

realised they were being sedated. From a place close to his ear on the

other side of the sack, he could just make out the sound of the director's

booming chuckle - which sounded to Adric a lot like 'ho, ho, ho'.

When Adric awoke he was sitting at one of the desk hubs he had seen

on the factory floor, with the Doctor on one side of him and one of the

green-skinned creatures - a young female, he thought - on the other. A

little woozy from the effects of the sedative, he struggled to register what

was going on around him. A dozen or so of the creatures were seated at

this hub - like him, facing a computer screen with a keyboard at their

fingertips. Most of them seemed hard at work, but the one to his right was

staring directly at him.

'I - what ?' he started to say, but the creature stopped him.

'Don't try to speak yet,' she said kindly. 'You're just waking up.' Her voice was slow and deliberate, as if she was a little sedated herself. No doubt that was true, Adric thought: the scented air was the director's method of keeping the creatures in line.

'Who are you?' he blurted out at length.

'I'm Grace Lord,' said Grace, and smiled at him beatifically.

'But the Doctor...' Adric tried to turn round, and only then realised that his left wrist and both legs were manacled to the desk. He just had time to register two things: first, the Doctor staring directly at his screen, tapping away at the keyboard impassively; and second, him leaning over very slightly in Adric's direction and giving him an impressively subtle wink.

'He's been trained already,' said Grace. 'I'll show you what to do.' She took Adric's right hand very gently and lifted it to the keyboard, where she dropped it onto some simple navigation keys. Adric looked at the screen and saw what looked like one child's list of desired presents, and a series of pointers on where to acquire them. He noticed there were ticks and crosses next to each item.

'Just let me know if you can't find anything,' Grace said, and dreamily returned to her terminal.

Adric turned to the Doctor.

'Just look at the screen,' the Time Lord hissed under his breath, still

looking straight ahead.

'Oh yes,' said Adric.

'We've been drugged, I'm afraid,' the Doctor went on. 'But the good

news is that you can get us both free.'

'I can?' Adric looked woozily down at the manacle on his left wrist and

noticed the Doctor's pencil, the one he had stuffed in his pockets earlier,

jammed into the locking mechanism. 'Yes, I see. That's very clever.'

'When you've got both hands free, you should be able to use that to take

off the other restraints,' the Doctor said, 'but there's something even more

urgent than that Did you manage to do anything with our genial host's

computer earlier?'

'I don't know. Possibly,' Adric said, finding it difficult to concentrate.

The whole room seemed to be swimming around him. 'With any luck the

protocols are relaxed and I can access parts of it from here,' he said.

'That would be marvellous,' said the Doctor. 'I think our priority,' he

said, shuffling a little so Adric could see the oversized gas mask protruding

from his pocket, 'if you can keep your head in this atmosphere, is to see if

we can turn off that... '

He twitched his head very slightly to his right, and Adric turned to see

the large window showing the icy landscape.

'I don't follow you.'

'Look at it closely.'

Adric tried to do so, while putting the gas mask to his face, and it was a

moment or so before the scented air started to lose its effect and he found

he could concentrate. If he stared hard at the vista, he could see that the

image was very slightly blurred.

'It's not a window at all, is it?' he whispered.

'I don't think it is,' the Doctor said. 'So what's really outside?'

Adric set to work on hacking the computer.

'What have you got on your face?' Grace asked after a while. She seemed

quietly intrigued.

'Ssh,' Adric said, and put his finger to his lips, in a gesture he'd seen the

Doctor perform more than once.

'I hope you've asked the director's leave to do this,' she said, looking at

the unfamiliar images on Adric's computer screen.

'Why do you do what he says? He hasn't got you chained,' he said,

noting the lack of manacles on Grace's arms and feet.

The managing director is to be obeyed,' said his colleague blankly. She

looked on the verge of passing out

'Why?' Adric retorted. 'You should get out of this factory.'

Grace stared at him, simply confused for a moment.

'Where would we go?' she said at length.

'I don't know. Back to your home planet, I suppose. We could take you,

the Doctor and me.'

Grace's doped eyes brightened a little at this, but the lost, pathetic sense

of tiredness didn't leave her face. 'Even a minute outside would kill us,'

she said. 'Our home is a very warm place. Out there, it's...' She seemed to

struggle to find the right words. 'It's too cold.' She smiled weakly. 'If we

work hard enough, we might be allowed home... one day.' Tears seemed

about to form in the corners of her eyes.

'Oh, you poor thing,' Adric said. With an effort, he turned his attention

back to the computer. 'But, I really think the Doctor and I can help. We'll

get you home.' He gave her what he hoped was a reassuring smile. The

effect was immediate and gratifying, a huge smile across her angelic face.

'My goodness!' said Grace. 'Thank you. I'll tell my friends right now.'

Adric wondered briefly whether she was serious, but it was clear

Grace had taken him at his word. Before long there was a murmuring

of confusion spreading across their hub of desks, and the next hub was

wondering what the fuss was about

'Obviously highly suggestible,' said the Doctor. 'In combination with

this atmosphere, that must have been very useful to the Andromedans. So

much so, there was no need for a full management team here. Just condition

them to obey Mr Claus, and take away any thoughts of resistance.'

Adric finished his work at the computer, and reached down to release

his and the Doctor's manacles, whispering to the Doctor as he did so. 'The

image on the window should be fading in a few seconds,' he said. 'And

there's something else linked to it too, but I couldn't tell what... '

'I have an idea,' said the Doctor, 'and if I'm right we need to get back to

the TARDIS quickly. Come on.'

They got up from their desk, just in time to see the vast window on the

wall of the factory shimmer and fill up with bright white light When it

faded, the image of the snowy landscape had vanished, to be replaced by a

lush, green jungle. The reaction from the creatures was almost immediate,

gasps of surprise and shrieks of joy.

'It's Salostopus,' the Doctor explained, reaching over to remove Adric's

pointed hat a little regretfully. 'They never even left here. The cost of

transporting them from their own planet would have been far too high,

so the Andromedans simply built the factory here and set up a space-warp

bypass to their target market instead. But to keep them subdued, they've

made it appear to them as if they're light years away from their home.'

Adric frowned. 'But why haven't the creatures' families noticed the

factory and tried to break in?'

They might,' said the Doctor. 'But the Andromedans are past masters at

building inconspicuous-looking structures. A bit more so than the Time

Lords, in fact,' he added with a hint of envy. They probably made it look

like a mountain, or something like that.'

The creatures were really moving now, some of them running across the

floors and shouting to each other. The few nearest the director's office were

running towards it and yelling. From out of it, Mr Claus came hurtling at

breakneck speed, knocking the creatures over as he ran through them.

'What worries me is that we've probably destabilised the link,' said the

Doctor, 'which is why he's so keen to get to the showroom. Come on, we

need to follow his lead.'

Adric looked up towards the entrance through which they'd come.

Dishearteningly, it was three floors down from their work stations, and

on the other side of the vast room. He started running. As they hurtled

down the ramp, to the next floor, he was shocked to see that some of the

creatures had started fighting among themselves, pushing and grabbing

at each other like frightened children.

'Look at them,' he said to the Doctor. 'They must be panicking. We've

got to do something.'

The Doctor frowned, and nodded thoughtfully. Walking over to the rail

and overlooking the floors below, he tried calling out in a raised voice. 'It's

all right, everyone,' he said. 'There's no need to fight This is Salostopus.

You're home, and safe.'

A few of the creatures seemed to look up at him, confused, but most

just ignored him. Adric was disappointed. 'I suppose not every tall man

in a red coat has to be obeyed,' he said. 'Although you do almost look the

part,' he added.

The Doctor looked surprised for a moment, then seemed to notice his

long red coat, and smiled playfully. 'Let's try something else,' he said. He

raised his voice still further, and used the same booming tone that the

director had. 'You're home and safe, everyone,' he said. 'Ho, ho, ho.' And

then, as an afterthought: 'Merry Christmas!'

This time the effect on the creatures' mood was palpable: confusion at

first, but then a wave of goodwill. The fighting seemed to have stopped;

a few of the creatures started laughing. Then, from a few floors below, a

hesitant but increasingly loud cheer rippled its way around the factory.

'That's more like it,' the Doctor said, and pulled his scarf back up

around him. 'Now, let's get out of here.' The two of them ran down

another two ramps and round to the exit door, which by now had started

flashing alarmingly.

With a last minute flash of fondness, Adric looked back up towards

Grace, who waved at him. He smiled and waved back, then quickly slipped

through the door after the Doctor.

He was relieved to find the showroom still there on the other side of

the door. Almost as soon as they had passed through it though, it flashed

once more and turned a dull, opaque grey. Adric guessed that the portal

between this world and Salostopus had closed.

They found the director standing a little grumpily by his robot reindeer.

'Why did you have to go and do that?' he said. 'I worked hard to build up

that company. Well, my staff did,' he added after a while.

'I suppose it'll teach you to set up business so far from home,' said the

Doctor. 'No telling what might happen, you know. You'll have to revise

your risk estimate, advise your company not to bother here any more.'

The director scowled at him. 'Time Lord, I suppose?' he said, nodding

towards the TARDIS. 'Didn't count on you intervening, to be honest.'

The Doctor didn't respond.

'It was a perfectly reasonable business proposition,' the director

continued, sitting himself down on the chariot with a sigh. 'Thirty years of

research and preplanning, you know; and all my own idea too.' He seemed

to be appealing to the Doctor for sympathy, even approval.

'The rest of the Salostopus team were all for just invading this world and

plundering its mineral deposits, of course, but I wanted something a bit

more long term. It's not often you find a naturally occurring space-warp

link across galaxies, as you know. And it took a lot of effort to stabilise

it.'

The Doctor nodded sagely. 'Yes. Could take millennia to repair that, I'm

afraid,' he added with a smile.

'So, you know, I said, why waste it? This Christmas thing is going to be

around for a while. And meanwhile, we're sitting there on the northern

hemisphere of Salostopus, with an incredibly passive species in the

southern hemisphere who are absolutely fit for the purpose. Shame, I

suppose all that labour will just go to waste now,' he said.

The Doctor glared at him. 'You think so?'

'Oh, yes,' said the director sorrowfully. He didn't seem to have even

noticed the Doctor's disapproval.

'So, are you going to take me home then?' he said. 'I'll have to wait months for the company to collect me.'

Adric frowned, not quite believing his audacity. 'You did knock us out and try to force us into slavery,' he pointed out.

The director grinned. 'Yes, but that was business,' he said, and laughed jovially. He looked disappointed when the Doctor and Adric failed to join

in. 'You're not going to, are you?' he said.

'You can take that silly beard o f f now, you know,' the Doctor said. 'I assume it's as thick as that to shield your airways from the sedative.'

The director looked wounded. 'No,' he said. 'This is mine.'

'Oh,' said the Doctor. 'Sorry.'

There was an awkward silence.

The problem is, it's only a few weeks till Christmas,' said the director.

He clearly thought this was a persuasive point to argue, but in fact it had

the opposite effect. The Doctor's eyes gleamed, and he patted a reindeer's

head excitedly.

"Really?' he said. 'Good heavens, man. So you simply have to stay!'

The director spluttered. 'What?' he said. 'With no workers?'

The Doctor grinned, and indicated the chariot. 'This sleigh seems fit to fly,' he said, 'and your reindeer might fly with it if you made some modifications. And I imagine you won't have any problems accessing your

customers' money. You've got contracts to fulfil, my old friend!'

The director sneered. 'No, no,' he said, 'there's no way I can be held to

that. This is a *force* majeure, surely.'

'It's a blessing in disguise,' the Doctor responded. 'And here.' He took

the hourglass out of his pocket. 'Ifyou have trouble getting around all of

your customers in one night, you could try using this. A chronological

damper. Holds time in a local loop, just slowing it you understand, but

enough for your purposes.'

The director stuck out his tongue.

'That's enough of that. Merry Christmas, Mr Claus. Come on, Adric.'

He led his companion into the TARDIS, and then shut the doors quickly

behind them. Adric thought he caught a glimpse of the director trying to

barge in after them, but he was too old and his costume was too bulky for

him to move quickly enough.

Adric felt a little shell-shocked as he watched the TARDIS's outer doors

close. He looked at the Doctor as he started to set the controls. 'Are we

really going to leave him there?' he asked.

'Oh, he'll be all right,' the Doctor said airily. 'His species are exceptionally

long-lived. He can wait a few months until his fellow directors pick him

up.' He seemed lost in thought for a moment, then added: That's if they

decide to send an intergalactic frigate, of course, for such a small

rescue

mission. If they want to cut corners, it could be considerably longer. Still,

that's business for you.' He reached into his pocket and brought out

Adric's stocking, bulging a little with an object wedged in its heel. 'Here

you are, Adric,' he said brightly. 'Have a satsuma.'

A little bewildered, Adric took the offering. He decided he was grateful.

'Thank you, Doctor,' he said, and reached into his overalls for the object

he'd taken from the showroom as the Doctor and director had been

speaking. 'Have a mince pie,' he said. Then, as an afterthought: 'Merry

Christmas, Doctor.'

The Doctor's face broke into a grin. 'That's the spirit, Adric!'

He took off his hat, and placed it on the central column as it began to

rise and fall. He took a bite of his mince pie, and offered the rest to his

companion. 'Yes, that's the spirit...'

The Taoist festival of peace and renewal, Ta Chiu, takes place in Hong Kong on 27 December. People summon the gods and ghosts of their ancestors so that the power will renew their lives and fulfil wishes for the coming year.

The Taoist festival of peace and renewal.

Hong Kong 1974

Exclave

Joff Brown

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Peri

'Abundant awareness is pervading, rests on equanimity, is expansive, may not be

measured in every respect, and is linked to inner purity,' said Cheung conscientiously.

He walked behind the Abbot into the audience chamber.

'Yeah, yeah,' said the Abbot, dropping himself onto the mat. 'Never mind about all

that.' The Abbot struck a match. He lit a yellow? cigarette and inhaled deeply. Tell me about Platinum Dragon. Is it real? Is it dangerous?'

'I saw Platinum Dragon,' said the monk. 'I did much more than see it, Master.

Unbelievable power. A kind of horrible -'

The Abbot frowned, and Cheung felt a cold sweat start to form on his brow. 'Tell me

from the beginning, Hu Cheung.'

Cheung inclined his head. Where to start, Master?' Cheung gazed away from the

Abbot. He consciously studied his perceptions, as he'd been taught. Golden pillars,

mirrored charms that twisted slowly. The thick scent of jasmine and cigarette smoke,

filling the red room. The essence of serenity. What here could relate to Platinum Dragon?

'Everything was grey. Foggy, Master,' said Cheung, slowly. 'Especially in this month

of December. And the buildings rise up like, like -'

'Cheung,' said the Abbot. 'I have been to Hong Kong, you know. It's only

sixty

miles or so away. What do you think I am, some kind of yokel?'

Cheung bowed his shaved head so the Abbot wouldn't see his face redden. 'Of

course not, Master. That is, everything would have been grey, if it hadn't been for the lights...'

Cheung settled into the rhythm of his story.

Everything would have been grey, Master, if it hadn't been for the Christmas

lights. All over Kowloon, and illuminating Hong Kong across the bay.

Pictures of Nice Old Father everywhere, his white beard and red clothes

and reindeer. His giant laughing face. Huge banners proclaiming peace on

Earth and benevolence towards all humanity. I even saw models of the god

Jesus being born in a stable, surrounded by friends and animals.

The real life of the city going on around it all. Bicycle rickshaws and

meat sellers. Movie theatres, businessmen and coolies. Everywhere, new

buildings! So many people! I'd forgotten. It had been 14 years since I left

Hong Kong and came to the Monastery, Master. Fourteen years since I left

the Walled City of Kowloon.

When I left the Walled City, it was a tumbledown slum. Now, they say

there are twenty thousand people in there. Thirty, maybe. Who knows?

In the years before I left, we had eaten dogs and cats to survive. Now,

the

Walled City is virtually its own country. And yet it's only one city block on

the outskirts of Hong Kong, perforated with a thousand windows. I've seen

those windows flower with white sheets hung out to dry; but today, as I

passed out of the city's sprawl, the fractured bulk loomed dour and smooth

as I approached. Just a single city block on the outer sprawl, somehow

sculpted into its own world. A Chinese world, not a Hong Kong one at all.

There were no guards at the flaking door that I passed through; at least,

none that I could see.

Inside, men crouched at a corner, betting on two praying mantises

fighting in a tiny ring. Tanks of murky water hid lobsters caught from the

Bay that morning. These sights were familiar to me. Businessmen in suits

from the other side ofthe Bay, too. They were looking, I suppose, for cheap

love and somewhere to play cards.

But some things were different. I saw girls with faces painted in butterfly

designs, swirling colours. Guitar music, a heavy rhythm, pounding. The

Rolling Stones. Western influences, even in the Walled City.

I shuffled along the impossibly crowded streets. Men and women

laughed at my saffron robes and shaven head. I suppose they sniggered

at my thick glasses, too. Someone tried to snatch them off my head, but I

grabbed them back just in time. I touched my left side to feel the comfort

of my protection, hidden under my saffron robe.

The Walled City really had changed. Everywhere I looked, ramshackle

buildings had bloomed. Rickety lean-tos, corrugated iron sheds. Even

tower blocks, many storeys high. Streets so narrow and walls so high, you

couldn't see the sun. Along one water-stained concrete wall, a market had

sprung up. Tiny shrines everywhere by the side of the path, some with ash

cups in which incense burned. Offerings to divine ancestors like Royal

Uncle Cao and Iron-Crutch Li. Tiny gods, keeping the Walled City alive.

I plunged into the market. To my shame, Master, at this time, I didn't see

them following me.

'Hey, Monk!' an old man called. 'Finches for sale! The most beautiful

in the Walled City!' He pushed a cage into my face. Shooing him away, I

passed noodle stalls, sellers of Western T-shirts, makeshift magazine

kiosks. Terrapins in tanks, scrabbling meaninglessly to escape their

worldly prison. As we all do, Master.

As I was meditating on this, I felt a hand on my neck.

I turned to see them at last. Four thin, arrogant youths, in jackets with

hitched-up sleeves. Standing behind a young man in a grey suit and dark

glasses. He had a toothpick in his mouth, and his hand was pinching my

neck hard.

'Going to a fancy-dress party?' he snarled softly. 'Or are you some kind

of weirdo who gets his kicks from shaving his head and dressing up like a

monk?' I remembered that this is always the way with the younger Triads.

The New Heaven and Righteousness gang was no different from any of the

rest

I remained impassive, head down. If I wasn't any fun, they'd get bored

and move on.

The leader took his dark glasses off and threw them to one of his lackeys,

who cleaned the frames with enthusiasm. It was only then that I recognised

the leader.

First fury welled up in my heart, Master, and then a huge and formless

sadness. Because I knew who he was now; but Hu Bak hadn't recognised me

at all. The word 'brother' was on my lips, but I clamped them shut. Bak must

have seen my tortured look, though, because he put his dark glasses back on

and tapped me under the chin. Think you're better than us, do you,

baldy?'

If it had been anyone else I would have just nodded and smiled. Master, I

know this was the first of many mistakes. But something made me blurt

out: 'Not think I'm better than you. I know it.'

There was a moment of injured silence. Then his four associates

pantomimed sardonic surprise. T h e monk's got an attitude problem!'

'Somebody's been huffing the incense too long!'

My brother cracked his knuckles ostentatiously. I tensed for a punch,

knowing I would not strike back, but his body moved in such a way as to

indicate he was about to administer a hefty kick. His well-shined shoe

hit me in the chest and I doubled over, heaving for breath. Before I could

stand again, a second lack landed me on my back. My ribs felt like fire.

Looking up, I could see the five of them leaning over me. One of Bak's

reedy associates pulled out a butterfly knife and flicked it open. Mother-of-

pearl handle, slim bright blade. He brought it down, fast to my chest, as if

he couldn't care less that he was about to fillet me.

They must have been surprised that I didn't scream or yell. He

stopped the blade lightly at my robes. A flicker of anger passed over

the impassive face of the knife-holder. Oh, Master! I'd annoyed him

by pulling his own detachment trick. He'd meant me to squeal and

dash off, so he could give my rump a lack, laugh and forget about it.

I'd denied him that easy way out. This meant that there was no way he

could let me live, now.

Master, I did not tense as he prepared to stab down again. I could feel the

weight of my burden at my side. I knew what I would have to do if I was to

complete your orders and see Platinum Dragon.

But the blade withdrew and the five figures dashed away. I jumped to

my feet and saw that they were running off, down a dank alley that led to a

windowed tenement.

A tall European with curls of light-coloured hair was whispering into a

metal tube like a microphone. A dark-haired, well-proportioned Western

woman stood by him. The man flipped the metal tube in the air and caught

it He arched an eyebrow and put the tube back into his absurd patchwork

jacket They thought they heard their leader calling for reinforcements,'

he said. 'So they'll be back soon, when they find out it was simply a

technological trick of mine.'

The woman helped me up. 'I didn't know you could do that, Doctor.' She

turned her big eyes to me. 'Are you all right, sir?'

They both spoke perfect Cantonese. Not just good, *perfect.* Better than any

British in Hong Kong I had ever met. Have you ever seen a movie

dubbed

from English into Cantonese, Master? Well, it was nothing like that. And

yet... the effect was the same. As if I wasn't hearing their actual words.

Their lips seemed to make the right shapes, but the meaning seemed

somehow filtered.

'You should leave,' I told them. 'It's not a good idea for Europeans to

come into the Walled City.'

The Doctor grabbed my arm. 'But it's fine for clueless monks, is it?'

I stood up to my full height, nearly reaching the Doctor's lapels. 'If you'll

excuse me,' I said huffily. 'I have business to attend to. Many thanks for my

fortunate escape.'

'Come on,' the woman pulled at the Doctor. 'I don't like it in here. It

smells funny, and everyone looks at me like I'm an alien.'

'You are an alien here, Peri,' the Doctor said. 'From half a planet away. In

your own way, you're as alien as Platinum Dragon.'

You can imagine that I stopped in my tracks.

'You'd better come with me,' I said.

Although the Walled City had changed so much, there were still some

constants in its shifting geography. Hong's bar still sat at the nexus of six

dirty pseudo-streets, recessed back into dimness where nobody would

look. We elbowed our way through the unstoppable crowds and squeezed

into a booth.

'What do you know about Platinum Dragon?' I hissed.

The Doctor shrugged. 'Only what Master Wong told me.'

'The Master Wong?' I laughed. 'You think you know Wong Fei Hung. Oh,

I see. You're mad! That explains the clothes. And the fact of your being in

the Walled City at all.'

'Wong Fei Hung was a good sort who stood up for the people to all

manner of imbeciles. Sort of like your Robin Hood,' the Doctor explained

to Peri.

'Hey,' she replied, 'He's not my Robin Hood. Robin Hood was English.'

'I stood shoulder to shoulder with Master Wong when he defeated the

Five Lotus Clan,' the Doctor continued.

'Oh, in 1867?' I asked sardonically.

'1869,' he corrected me. 'Everyone seems to get that date wrong. Still,

they were chaotic times. But I'm sure Master Wong was the first to call it

Platinum Dragon. Goodness knows I'd never found a name for the horrible

thing.'

Master, I don't think you know this, but Platinum Dragon is slang for

a pistol in the Walled City. 'He's packing Platinum Dragons,' we'd say

of some strutting thug. Or we'd hear gunshots and say 'The Platinum

Dragons are roaring tonight.'

'Anyway. How do you know about Platinum Dragon?' asked the

Doctor,

prodding me in the chest.

'My Abbot told me. Master Wong is said to have passed down a story

to a monk from our monastery - Lingyan Monastery, that is, in Lantau.

Platinum Dragon, a being from one of the other Planes of Existence, is

fated to appear on this day, every 108 years.'

'Did this prophecy include the appearance of a second traveller; one

who seemed to be a man, but was the repository of ancient and wonderful

knowledge? A man dressed, perhaps, in the same outlandish way as

myself?' asked the Doctor.

I shook my head.

'Huh,' the Doctor said. 'Thanks for nothing, Wong.'

Together, we negotiated the teeming alleys, slipping through districts

I only barely remembered. The Doctor seemed to know the way. 'Your

directions to Platinum Dragon are laughably imprecise. It's fortunate for

you that I turned up.'

'Why don't you talk properly?' I asked, as I scanned the streets for Triads.

'It's like you're speaking Cantonese, only you're not'

'You noticed that?' said Peri with interest 'Really, hardly anybody does.'

'The Blessed Mind discerns things as they are,' I quoted. 'It's part of

a Buddhist monk's mission to see everything with clarity, unclouded by

preconceptions.'

'A laudable goal,' opined the Doctor.

'Well, I'm glad my 2500-year-old religion meets with your approval,' I

replied drily.

'You're very sarcastic for a monk,' said the Doctor. 'And now I come to

think of it, you don't seem to be very impressed with the fact that I've met

Master Wong in person.'

I sighed. 'There are an infinity of universes. Each is made of five Planes.

Each Plane contains infinite multitudes of beings: gods, half-gods, demons,

ghosts and men. Monks of the past have battled countless demons. Their

bodies have not decayed after death. They could transmit thoughts from

mind to mind without speaking. They could raise themselves into the air,

and they could transport themselves over huge distances in an eye's blink.'

I counted the achievements off on my fingers as we hurried down the street

'If you're looking for a view of the world that's limited to what we can see,

Doctor, I suggest you go speak to the British.'

'Hmph. Down here.' The Doctor pointed to slime-covered stairs in the

corner of a disused courtyard. Descending, we reached a bare stone wall,

over which hung a small mirror on an octagonal frame, the kind of thing

the people use to ward off demons. The Doctor picked it up and pressed

the I Ching symbols around its edge. They gave off a fluting tone, and the

mirror's surface seemed to ripple.

The Doctor shook his head. 'It won't hold it long - a few millennia more

at most But I can't think of anything better.'

Before I could ask him what he meant, the wall peeled itself back as if it

were paper. This was a marvel, but nothing compared to what was behind

it.

Crouched in the hollow behind the wall, man-size or taller, gleaming in

dark rainbows exactly like oil on water, spiked and sharded, full of terrible

potentiality, sat Platinum Dragon.

Master, you know the awe and veneration one feels when one contemplates

a statue of the Buddha? Imagine that feeling... in reverse.

'I feel ill,' said Peri.

Platinum Dragon stirred, in a movement not exactly animal, not exactly

mechanical. Five lights on the area that might have been its head glowed,

in an unknown colour that made my eyes ache. We all took a step back,

even the Doctor.

'What land of creature is Platinum Dragon?' I whispered.

'Not a creature, not exactly,' said the Doctor. 'Think of it more like

a... what's one of those things, looks a bit like a pineapple without any

leaves?'

'A pinecone?' asked Peri.

'No... that's it! A hand grenade,' said the Doctor grimly. 'Platinum

Dragon is a hand grenade after the pin has been pulled out. But before the

explosion.' He beckoned to Platinum Dragon, and the thing unfolded itself

forward. I can use no other term. 'To the rooftops,' said the Doctor quietly.

'Follow me, you two, and, whatever you do, don't touch it.'

It was, in some ways, stranger than the horrors that were to follow, tailing

the Doctor and Platinum Dragon as they climbed slowly, methodically up

the rickety stairs of the tower block that still smelt of fresh concrete. Peri

and I went behind them. Neither of us wanted Platinum Dragon at our

backs.

The Doctor was talking, as usual. 'Hong Kong, of course, is not China,'

he said. 'It's its own place. More British than Britain, in some ways.

But within Hong Kong, this place, the Walled City of Kowloon... that's

something else again.' And then he used a foreign word. 'It's an exclave,'

he said.

'You mean an enclave,' Peri corrected him.

He shook his head. 'Please, at least try to keep up, Peri. Exclave. A little

bit ofthe country next to the big country. An offshoot. A tiny piece of home

in alien territory. That is what the Walled City is. Here we are! The highest

place in the Walled City, I would think.'

He opened a door and went inside, Platinum Dragon insinuating itself

after him. I tried not to notice how it impossibly contorted parts of itself in

to fit through the space. Before Peri and I could enter, I heard a commotion

inside.

I ran through the door and saw what looked like a common room -

magazines scattered over sofas, movie posters on the wall: *Big* Drunken Hero

and *Dragon Gate* Inn. My brother Hu Bak had just stood up. His thugs were

surrounding the Doctor and Platinum Dragon. This room was obviously

their hangout. Like children, we'd walked right into their hands.

'Don't touch it!' the Doctor cried. 'Whatever you do, don't touch it!'

'What's this? A couple of Westerners, our monk friend and some kind

of... robot?' my brother sneered.

'Stay back,' said the Doctor. 'It's a dangerous weapon!'

'So is this,' said my brother. 'And it's the last thing you'll see.' He aimed

his gun at the Doctor's head.

There was a sound like a liquid hiss, and I caught a glimpse of

Platinum

Dragon's limbs moving in a blur. The Triads yelled as one of their number

was thrown into the wall, landing in a crumpled heap.

'Run!' cried the Doctor. He and Peri scrambled back through the doorway

as the Triads rushed down to their fallen comrade. 'Come on!' the Doctor

beckoned. I shook my head.

'I have to stay,' I said, but they had already pelted down the stairs.

I turned to see my brother looking coolly at Platinum Dragon. 'Looks like

an alien or something,' he mused. 'Crazy.' Platinum Dragon had resumed

its statue-like stillness. Even when it wasn't moving, it was hard to tell how

many limbs it had, how its physiology worked.

'Tony, do you want us to go after those Westerners?' a thug said to my

brother.

'Tony?' I said. 'You've taken a Western name, Bak?'

He looked at me, and narrowed his eyes. Finally, he saw who I was. 'You

lot!' he barked. 'Go. Find the Westerners! We have business here. Family

business.'

I stood between my brother Bak and Platinum Dragon, in the shadow

of that inhuman weapon. My brother was chewing a toothpick. He looked

utterly at his ease.

'Please. Don't touch it,' I said. My voice sounded soft and weak compared

to the Doctor's. My hand reached to my side, to check that everything was

in place.

He spat the toothpick out at my feet and laughed.

'I like your glasses, Cheung,' he said. 'That's why I didn't recognise you

before. They suit you down to the ground - little turtle.'

I hadn't heard that name in fourteen years. It still stung. 'So you're with

New Heaven and Righteousness now,' I said, absurdly. 'Why?'

He ignored me, moving closer to Platinum Dragon. 'I'm Red Pole in

New Heaven and Righteousness,' he said. 'That's what they call the muscle

man. The one who gets things done.'

'With guns,' I said to him. 'What do guns do?' Master, I'm sorry to say I

grew angry, thinking of my brother's life, all these years, all that violence.

'You have no chi, no life force. It's all in your weapon. And that force can be

turned against you, because any fool can pull a trigger.'

'Shut up,' my brother said. 'I reckon I can use this alien... weapon,

whatever it is. Maybe get right to the top, with this! There's some muscle

here, for sure!' He turned to me as if I were a member of the gang. 'Now get

out of my way. I've got no time for you.'

I remembered what I'd heard about the Triads, when we were young and

they had seemed like gods to us. 'What about the oaths? 'When my brothers

in Righteousness visit my house, I shall provide them with board and

lodging. I shall be killed by a myriad of knives if I treat them as strangers.'

Isn't that what you've sworn?'

My brother laughed.

'Ha! What are you talking about, you shaven-headed freak? New Heaven

and Righteousness are my brothers now. Brothers who don't leave when

the way is hard. They don't run off like cowards to become monks when

their brothers need their help. You know what else? They've taught me

how to fight. In the Hung Family style. Passed down from Master Wong

himself. While you've been burning incense, I've been surviving.'

He tried to shove me out of the way, but I wouldn't move. The muscles

of his face were set in anger. 'I've killed men for looking at me the wrong

way, you know that? Not because I wanted to. Because if I hadn't, I'd have

been dead myself. Killed by the ambitious little kids coming up behind me,

looking for any sign of weakness.'

'Those men,' I quoted, 'who, because of greed, delusion, fear or anger,

kill living creatures, go to the Hell of Revival, where they are killed over and

over again for many thousands of years.'

Perhaps this was unwise.

I had never seen such hatred before. He pulled back his fist and hit me

square in the face.

Except that he didn't. He looked down in surprise. His fist was in my

palm. He snarled - a real snarl - and grabbed his hand back. I looked at

him.

'Don't stare at me that way!' he yelled and shot out a kick to my

stomach.

He stumbled as he struck out at empty air. To one side, I studied his

movements.

'Huh,' he snorted. 'Tai chi. I get it. That soft stuff, that watered-down

series of muscle exercises for geriatrics. Using my force against me. It's

what the old guys do on the rooftops every morning!' He laughed and

strutted up to me. 'But they never taught you how to hit back, did they?'

He stood square on to me. Intimidatingly close.

'Come on then, little brother. Give it your best shot. You get one punch

and -' He was sprawling against the thin wall, plaster drifting to the floor

around him. All the breath was gone from his body. I knew exactly how his

chest would be aching right now.

'For the first seven years or so,' I informed him as he stumbled to his

feet, 'one does indeed study the flow of the body's chi and the Thirteen

Principles. But the next seven years are concerned with perfecting the, ah,

so-called external forms.'

'You dare hit me?' Without seeming to make a conscious effort, he settled

into a low, dangerous crouch.

As for myself, I was already on the mid-point that exists between total

relaxation and utter awareness.

His first strokes were swift, precise. I was taken aback by his surprising

grace. This was Hung family kung fu; a far cry from our flowing tai chi.

It was fast, straight, brutally elegant. He used the Hung's Tiger Fist

well, and he was proficient at the Shadowless Kick. But I diverted all his

blows, siphoning his strength away from me. For every direct strike, I had

a sweeping counter-move. For every speedy kick, I would unbalance his

footwork. Because I could see how my brother moved. He had, at best,

a surface knowledge of Hung Family style. All 'hard as iron', no 'soft as

thread'. The best Hung Family fighters can intercept the energy of a punch

with a profound knowledge of the Ten Forces. But my brother was allowing

himself to be hit, striking out in blind rage. I, on the other hand, was in the

heart of serenity, at one with the movements. For those brief minutes, the

world of illusion meant nothing to me. Bak saw the detachment in my face,

and somehow it enraged him further.

'Damn you!' he cried. 'Be angry at me! Hate me! Anything!' Master, how

my heart leaped inside me when he said this.

'Love and hate are both transitory,' I said with e f f o r t

'Am I nothing to you, then?' he blurted.

'Everything is nothing to me,' I said, my face set. 'I am a follower of the

Buddha. I've rejected the way of *the* visible world. Your way.'

His face fell, and for a second I saw the hurt, angry face of his childhood.

'Then we're not brothers any more,' he replied, slowly. 'And I'll kill you.'

He unleashed an attack I had never seen before, his arms blurring. It took

all my craft to deflect the blows. With a final motion my sifu would have been

proud of, I sent Bak stumbling across the room... and into Platinum Dragon.

I watched with horror as the thing enfolded itself around Bak with terrifying

speed. It seemed to move fluidly to intercept his flailing limbs, sucking

his torso in and covering it with its intricate, dark oil-rainbow colours.

Bak looked at me in horror and hate. 'Cheung! You traitor! It's a trap.'

His head was the last to be covered. It was as if his skin was replaced

by

the substance of Platinum Dragon. But instead of swallowing him whole,

Platinum Dragon was moulding itself to Bak's form.

The Doctor and Peri were thrown into the room by Bak's second-in-

command.

'We got them, Boss... Boss?' the thug and his companions watched the

absorption taking place.

'Oh, no.' The Doctor had his face in his hands. 'This is very bad indeed.'

'Doctor!' I yelled. 'Is my brother dead?'

'Worse,' said the Doctor, not looking at me.

'What do you mean?' I asked. Behind me, the thing that had been Bak and

Platinum Dragon - and was now a composite of both - reared up again.

In terror, the thugs unloaded bullets into it. They sank into its carapace

like pebbles into the sea, instantly absorbed. The Composite looked

around. It was adjusting to its circumstances. I swear I could feel Bak's pain

and rage, amplified a thousandfold. The thugs fled in fear, clattering out

of the door and down the stairwell. With terrifying slowness, each of the

Composite's arms extruded a single long claw, slightly curved like a rose

thorn.

'Projectile weapons are useless against it,' said the Doctor dully. 'And it's

immune to any of my technology. Your brother is in there, controlling it.

But it's controlling him, too.'

'Will this help?' I asked. I threw off my robe to stand in my saffron

leggings and tunic. I reached to my side, to the weapon I hadn't yet dared

use. Grabbing the handle of my sword, I withdrew it in a single motion.

The thin, wide blade barely quivered.

The Composite moved its blunt, half-human head towards me. It was

smaller than it had been before Bak had joined with it. Fatality gleamed off

its limbs. I seemed to see an echo of Bak's face somewhere in there, but

with five glowing eyes.

As soon as I held the sword, I knew what I had to do. I took up the old

swordfighting stance, from time out of mind: fore and mid fingers pointing

up, blade in the other hand, pointing forward. An unmistakable sign of

intent I was at the confluence of events, and my mind was as pointed as

the sword.

'My goodness,' I head the Doctor say behind me. 'I haven't seen Tai Chi

Sword performed in a good few centuries. This should be interesting.'

The thing's arms moved backwards around its head and down towards

me, in a way a human's never could. I danced away from its strike, bringing

my sword into contact with its midriff... except it had already spun back

around. Fast, so fast. By the time I had brought the sword up to block a

blow I could only feel coming, it was almost at my back. I could feel the

blade shiver like a live thing when it glanced off its thorn-blades.

Wide-eyed and sweating, I did everything I could to evade its furious

attacks. It moved in unnatural ways: torso swinging around full circle;

rearing up on its hands to fight with feet that sprouted obscene talons;

scuttling across the floor, more like a cockroach than a man.

'One touch is death,' yelled the Doctor. 'Only strike it with the sword!'

It turned in mid-jump, impossibly, to claw at me. My sword deflected its

trajectory into a wall covered with old movie posters. It crashed straight

through the wall as if it had been paper. Through the dust, I saw those

five eyes flicker, and then I was through the hole, pressing my slight

advantage.

'Cheung, you have to keep fighting it,' called the Doctor. He sounded

close to panic. 'Listen, I have no way to stop it And when it's done with

you, it'll take on someone else. One on one. Until they die. And again. And

again, six billion times, until everyone's dead.'

The Composite jumped up and attached itself to the ceiling like a

spider,

then distended a limb and tried to swipe me. Be like water, I told myself.

It's far too strong to hurt, but you can use its own energy against it. I

stepped away fluidly and the thing ripped through another wall, leaving

a long scar.

I slipped through the crumbling brick hole. A cold wind buffeted me; I

was on the roof of the highest place in the Walled City. I reeled momentarily

as I took it all in. The fog had lifted. Behind me, Kowloon sprawled

vertiginously, the lights of the Bay all but invisible from here. Ahead of me,

the new airport, off towards those beautiful hills that looked so much like

dragons' backs. As I watched, a Boeing 737 landed with no fuss at all, for

all the world as if there was no battle, and I wasn't about to die.

Behind me, the Composite recomposed itself through the gap and,

without a second's delay, was heading straight for me, thorn-blades

whirring like a machine. There was no time to move aside. I ducked and it

passed over me, one blade scoring deep into the rooftop inches from my

head. I watched as it tumbled off the side ofthe building. By the time I had

flipped back upright, whip-like extrusions had pulled it back onto the roof,

and it was heading for me again.

The Doctor and Peri scrambled out near me. 'I can't understand its chi,

its energy!' I yelled to them. 'It's much faster than me, and much stronger.

It moves so *wrongly*. It's only my skill keeping me alive.'

'Think!' shouted the Doctor. 'Where does the power of Platinum Dragon

come from?'

'From itself!' I panted. 'From its metal shards and spikes!'

'No! From your brother!' the Doctor replied. 'His rage. His pain. You've

spent half your life learning how to control that in yourself. Do it for him.'

I paused and nodded, then charged back into combat, forcing Platinum

Dragon to lash out as I wheeled past.

Then my sword was at what passed for the thing's throat, blocked by an

extended metal fork from a pseudopod arm. I blocked a low punch from an

oily silver appendage, wrenched the sword back and jumped back as a low

blow I almost didn't sense tried to knock me off my feet

Platinum Dragon raised itself upright in a horribly inhuman tangle of

bent-back limbs. It repurposed itself and moved, suddenly insectlike, back

into range.

I stood in the still place between action and inaction, neither calm nor

tense. My voice rang clear in the sudden silence. 'I won't hurt you,' I said.

'My brother.'

Platinum Dragon advanced up the wall of the shattered rooftop building

behind it I struck at the thing as it rose above me to gain a foothold onto the

ceiling. Two whiskery tendrils snaked down to grab the sword. I let them

wrap around the light metal blade and pulled, shifting my weight back. As

it made an ungainly scramble for the floor, something in the Composite

came unstuck and I feinted a kick at its shifting inner structures which it

could only partially block.

As it stumbled back up, that glistening mask receded from the

Composite, and, for an endless split second, I saw my brother's eyes.

Pleading. It was then that I knew what I had to do, while I had a chance.

Dropping the sword, I ran forward and dived into Platinum Dragon.

Master, you know better than anyone that some things can only be

explained by silence.

The first thing I saw when I came back to consciousness was the inert

body of Platinum Dragon, standing upright like a living statue, as if nothing

had ever disturbed its alien peace. It was facing out, over the chilly Hong

Kong skyline. The sky behind it was dark. I must have been unconscious

for hours.

The second thing I saw was my brother lying beside me. Peri was tending

the cuts that criss-crossed his face. I think she was crying. My skin felt

grated, but I was intact I wasn't sure what I remembered. One look at Peri's

face was enough to let me know she would never say what she'd seen.

I stared at my brother for what seemed like forever, until I saw his chest

rise and fell, oh so slightly.

The Doctor, you won't be surprised to hear, was talking. 'I don't know

where Platinum Dragon came from. When I first encountered it many

thousands of years ago, all I could do was trap it in what I thought then was

the emptiest, most godforsaken pile of rocks on Earth. How could I know

that humans would be stupid and brave enough to found a city here?'

I could hear that his accusatory tone was hiding his guilt He went to

stand by Platinum Dragon - not too near.

'So now I come back, every 108 years in December, when Platinum Dragon

awakes. Last time, Master Wong was here. He heard what Platinum Dragon

could do if it was ever used, and vowed that he'd pass on the message to

someone who might be able to protect people from it Which turned out

eventually to be our monastic friend here, I suppose.'

I sat up and groaned. 'It's over, then?'

'For now. Platinum Dragon will return to its hiding place for another

century soon.'

I realised I was trembling. 'So why do you do this? Why do you come

back? Ifyou can't beat it, if nobody can, what point is there in anything?'

The Doctor seemed to struggle to find the right word. 'Enlightenment?'

he said eventually. 'I can't defeat Platinum Dragon. Maybe it can't be

defeated, in our understanding of the term. So when it comes out, I show

it., you people. Humanity. In the hope that during its long gestation, or

countdown to detonation, it can learn. Grow in understanding. So that

when its time finally comes, and I can't hold it back, it may itself be able to

stop the slaughter it has been designed to cause.'

The Doctor motioned out to the sprawl of Kowloon, and beyond it, the

shimmering lights of Hong Kong Bay.

'Christmas. So many lights,' he said. 'So much wasted energy. So

much -' he waved his hands helplessly '- *glitter.* Myriad points of energy,

shining out in the darkness for a such a brief time. And then gone.' The

Doctor glanced quickly at Platinum Dragon, who was as still as ever. 'But

beautiful. Perhaps beautiful because of their transience.' I didn't know if he

was talking about the lights, or the humans that had made them. 'If this

one can understand that... maybe there's still a chance.'

I stood up and went to him. 'And do you think that Bak and I have...

made it worse? Speeded up the time of no return?'

The Doctor looked at me and smiled. 'No, Cheung. Maybe what it's been

through tonight has even done it good.' He chuckled. 'What is it that that

old joker Wu Cheng'en said? "Even a monkey may attain enlightenment."'

'And what about a weapon?' I asked. 'A thinking being, but one that has

been made in the form of a tool of destruction?' But as I said this, I was

looking past Platinum Dragon, at my brother.

The Doctor cocked his head. 'Well. Who knows? Here's to peace on

Earth.'

'And benevolence to all humanity,' I added.

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'Let's hope.'

'... And, well, that's all there is to tell, Master,' Cheung finished lamely. He looked up at his Abbot but, as ever, the old man gave nothing away. The Abbot finished his

eighth cigarette and stubbed it out carefully into a small jade dish.

'And what about your brother?' the Abbot asked.

A loud thumping came from behind him.

'C'mon, let me in, little turtle!' Hu Bale's voice was muted ***from*** *behind the wide doors. You said you were going to teach me tai chi!'*

European settlers took many traditions to the USA, including Christmas. In the South, settlers would send Christmas greetings to their distant neighbours by shooting firearms and letting off fireworks.

USA 1822

A Visit from Saint Nicholas

Lisa Miles

An adventure of the Third Doctor, with Sarah Jane

Glasses clinked and a couple of senior military types muttered cheers to

one another in a corner. Crepe-paper streamers hung limply from the

walls and a plastic Christmas tree glowed with multicoloured lights at one

end of the room. The Brigadier manfully circulated among his UNIT staff

and associates, trying to jolly up the proceedings with a few bluff jokes.

The party was quiet and formal and the atmosphere rather tame, but the

guests all seemed to be having a pleasant time. All of them except Sarah

Jane Smith. She was bored. She leant up against an office desk, picking at

her mince pie.

'Christmas can be so ridiculous,' she whispered crossly to the Doctor.

'It's not the same as it used to be when we were kids. When I was a little

girl, I longed for Christmas Eve. I always looked out ofthe window before I

went to sleep to see if I could spot the reindeer flying through the sky. Then

as soon as we woke up on Christmas morning, we opened our presents

in a rush.' Sarah Jane broke off and thought for a moment. 'I used to love

reciting the names of the reindeer. Dancer and Prancer and... '

The Doctor waited while she racked her brains. Annoyance passed

across her face and she pressed her fingers to her forehead. 'I must be able

to remember!' she complained.

The Doctor was amused. 'Sarah,' he interrupted her thought process.

'How much are you actually enjoying the Brigadier's party?'

'Well, it's a little... dull,' she replied, looking around guiltily in case

Lethbridge-Stewart was within earshot.

'Come on then. I've got an idea to help jog your memory.'

Clement C Moore looked over to where his wife Catharine lay in their four-

poster bed, gently snoring. She had endured an exhausting day, organising

the servants and the children to make sure that everything was ready for

tomorrow. After a more excitable than usual teatime and bath time, the

children had hung up their stockings on the chimney breast in the nursery

and said their prayers. Now they were tucked up into their beds, dreaming

no doubt of roast meats and sweet puddings. The servants had been sent

to their own quarters. Nothing would wake his wife until morning. All

was quiet.

Wrapped warmly in his dressing gown and wearing a silk cap over his

thinning hair, Clement walked softly into the adjoining room and closed

the heavy door carefully. He looked around his study. Shelves of books

and papers surrounded a polished wooden desk and a leather chair. A fire

still smouldered in the grate. Although it was dying down, it still threw

some light and warmth into the room. Clement lit the candles on the

mantelpiece. With a sigh, he sat down on the familiar seat and drummed

his fingers on the leather-topped desk. It was enormous and exquisitely

tidy, worthy of the landowner and learned professor of theology to whom

it belonged. Clement was proud of his achievements - he was a successful

academic and a good father to his young family. But tonight, Clement had

something on his mind and he couldn't sleep until he had set his thoughts

down on paper.

Back in the TARDIS, the Doctor set the controls. Sarah Jane hung onto the

console and there was the familiar jerk and whine as the journey began.

'Where *are* we going?' she grinned. The unpredictability of the Doctor

was something she loved. 'Come on, give me a clue!'

'Manhattan, hopefully.'

'Ooh! Ice-skating at the Rockefeller Centre?' she guessed. 'Or Christmas

lights in Times Square?'

'Not quite... but I think you'll like it!'

A huge shudder threw Sarah off her feet, accompanied by a deafening clatter. The Doctor grabbed the console, staring at the displays. Then he shrugged and smiled. 'Nothing to worry about.'

Sarah Jane steadied herself as the TARDIS stopped shaking. The noise subsided and the Doctor, apparently unconcerned, bustled off into one of the TARDIS's voluminous storage areas. He reappeared bearing a bundle of clothing. 'You'll need this,' he said, handing Sarah Jane an old-fashioned full-length, fur coat.

'Fur?' she questioned, wrinkling her nose.

'It's of the times, my dear!' He pulled on a heavy, woollen greatcoat over his velvet jacket, adjusted the frills of his shirt inside the coat and signalled towards the door. 'Shall we?' He pushed the door and freezing air whooshed in. Without warning, another ear-splitting clatter came from deep within the TARDIS.

'Is it a problem?' Sarah Jane asked. 'Will we get back okay?'

'Oh, yes! Somehow...'

Sarah Jane was used to the eccentricities of both the Doctor and his machine, so she didn't worry too much. Desperate to see New York, she peeped out from behind him, expecting the bright lights and buzz of the Big Apple. She gasped. Instead of the cityscape she'd anticipated, the

TARDIS had landed on the edge of an expanse of snow-covered lawn,

punctuated by the tall, wispy trunks of bare elm trees. At the far side was

a grand, three-storey mansion in colonial style. A driveway swept in an arc

across the lawn to one side of the house, while steps led up from a terrace

to a portico with impressive double front doors. The moon was full and

cast a stark light on the brilliant whiteness of the landscape. A soft hush

blanketed the whole scene. It was beautiful - the epitome o f a traditional

Christmas picture book illustration. She stepped out of *the* TARDIS and

stood in the untouched snow.

'This way,' urged the Doctor, taking her hand. 'I think we're going to be

just in time!'

Clement slid open a drawer at the front of the desk and took out his pen

and a clean sheet of paper. After dipping the pen in the ink well, he dated

the top of the sheet, December 24th, 1822 and wrote a title neatly underneath.

Notes *for a* New Work on the Greek Lexicon. He reached upwards for a volume of

ancient Greek poetry and began to flick through the pages. He found the

reference he was looking for and shuffled in his seat to get comfortable.

He set his pen to the paper but couldn't quite think of the words to begin.

His mind began to wander. What was the right approach to his theory?

He stared at the paper for a few minutes and then back at the book. It

was no good - the blank page was suddenly daunting. Feeling tired and

uninspired, Clement decided to go to bed after all. He would continue at a

time when he could apply himself better, perhaps after the festivities had

come and gone.

Clement trod softly back to his bedroom, removed his dressing gown

and climbed under the thick eiderdown. Sighing contentedly, he was just

about to roll over and settle down when there was a tremendous clatter

from the lawn outside. 'What...!' he exclaimed and rose up with a start.

With a backward glance at Catharine, not wanting to alarm her, he jumped

out of bed. She didn't stir. He darted into his study and, with a hammering

heart, pulled open the shutters and looked through the window. He could

see nothing through the thick glass pane. He waited. A minute passed

and there it was again, another clatter - and surely this time someone

was talking. Clement yanked open the sash and leant out of the window.

'Who's there?' he cried softly, trying to be as quiet as possible. But now, all

was silent Moonlight bathed the entire lawn of the mansion, making the

newly fallen snow sparkle brightly, almost as if it were daylight

Hanging further out of the window and feeling the chill of the North

American winter blast his face, Clement looked right and left, peering into

the trees on the edge of his park. He saw nothing and was about to retreat

back into the warmth of his study when an incredible thing happened.

A miniature sleigh pulled by a fleet of tiny reindeer landed smack in the

middle of his lawn. And driving the sleigh was a little old man.

On Clement's snow-covered lawn, Sarah Jane Smith stamped her feet

against the bitter cold. The Hudson River was merely a short distance

away and an icy breeze was numbing her cheeks. She pulled the fur coat

closer around her neck and sighed with impatience. 'When are you going

to tell me what we're doing here, Doctor?' she hissed. 'It's beautiful, but

it's very cold! When you said Christmas in Manhattan, this wasn't what I

had in mind.'

Sarah Jane looked back longingly to where the TARDIS stood beneath

the bare branches of a tall elm. The soft, glow from its windows was

reflecting on the winter-white surroundings. At least it was warm inside

there, she thought, malfunction or no malfunction.

Then she heard a noise, like a jingling of bells far above her.

Clement closed his eyes for a second and refocused. Now the old man was

brandishing the reins with quick, lively movements and calling out to his

team in a gruff voice: 'Come on Dasher, now Dancer! That's it Prancer, and

you Vixen! On we go Comet, on we go Cupid! Now Dunder and Blixem.'

With a flash of their tiny hooves, the reindeer launched into the air once

more. Clement blinked and counted them as they flew above him out of

sight - sure enough, there were eight. He banged the window shut and

shook his head. He was a rational man, but at the same time he was in

no doubt about what he had just witnessed. With a boyish excitement,

Clement felt a thrill rush through him and an immense smile spread

across his face. What an adventure! He heard a pattering and scraping

on the roof above. Instinctively, he ran through the bedroom past his still

sleeping wife and pelted down the long landing towards the children's

nursery. Later on, he remembered thinking how strange it was that he

had managed to find such speed - a man of his age! He skidded to a halt

outside the nursery door and listened.

Daring to open the door just a crack, he peered into the empty room.

Moonlight poured in through the unshuttered window, playing on the

nursery floor and illuminating the colourful rugs and the boxes of

toys.

Doors led from the nursery into the baby's bedroom where she slept

with her nanny, but there was no sound from anyone. Not a creature was

stirring... Unsure what to do, Clement hesitated for a second and began

to doubt himself. Then there was a soft thump near the fireplace. Clement

gazed at the chubby little man standing in front of him. He looked like a

jolly old elf, Clement thought. The man was dressed from head to foot in

fur and smudges of ash and soot marked his coat and dirtied his boots.

His eyes twinkled and his round, red cheeks were creased with deep,

merry dimples. He had a snub nose, red like a cherry, and a droll mouth

turned up into a neat smile. Clamped between his teeth was a stump of a

pipe, which he puffed at intermittently. A thick, long, white beard tumbled

down to his tubby stomach and, best of all, he had a rough sack slung

across his back, bursting out at the top with books, games and toys, fruit,

boxes of nuts and sprigs of holly.

The plump little man looked directly at Clement and gave him a broad

smile, which built slowly into a deep chuckle that made his round belly

shake like jelly. Clement couldn't help but laugh back. The two men said

nothing, but the stranger gave Clement a wink and nodded his head, giving

him the assurance that he had nothing whatsoever to be frightened of.

Without further delay, the little man went straight to his work. He filled

up the whole row of stockings above the fireplace, including the ones

for mama and papa. There was a rag doll for the youngest girl and a toy

trumpet for the youngest boy. Every child's stocking was sprinkled with

a handful of nuts and a shiny new coin. After the last gift was given, he

turned with a jerk to where Clement stood, fixed to the spot. He tapped his

finger on one side of his nose and nodded for a final time before stepping

into the grate and disappearing up the chimney.

For a second, Clement remained motionless with the wonder of what

he had just seen. Then he sprang into life and galloped back down the

landing to his bedroom. Dashing past Catharine, he flung himself back

into his study and reopened the window. He heard a low whistle and a

gruff voice called out 'Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!'

Reluctantly, he shut the window and sank back down into the soft leather

chair. He sat there for nearly an hour, shaking his head and grinning like

a child. Slowly he surfaced from his reverie, picked up the piece of writing

paper before him and reviewed what he had written. Notes for *a New*

Work on

the Greek Lexicon, indeed! Clement chuckled to himself.

Feeling newly inspired and as eager as a boy, he pushed the paper aside,

took a fresh sheet from his drawer and began again at the top.

Christmas Eve, 1822

Twas the *night* before Christmas, when all through the house,

Not a creature *was stirring,* not *even a* mouse...

And he settled down to write.

Standing freezing on the lawn, Sarah was staring in puzzlement at the

snow-covered rooftop.

'Ah-ha! Here he comes now,' said the Doctor. 'You'll find a few carrots in

your coat pockets, Sarah Jane. Actually... you'll find eight You're probably

going to need them.'

And suddenly Sarah knew why. The Doctor stepped forward with a hand

raised in greeting, as the eight tiny reindeer landed as lightly as snowflakes

on *the* lawn before them, breath rising from their nostrils.

'Hello, old chap! It's been a few years,' laughed the Doctor, as Saint

Nicholas leapt down from his seat and slapped him on the back. The

Doctor fished out a silver hip flask from his coat pocket and waved it in

offering. 'This is my friend, Sarah Jane Smith. I believe she wants to be

introduced to your reindeer... '

In some parts of Africa, Christmas dinner is not complete without fufu and okra soup. In others, rice, beef and biscuits are the order of the day.

Eastern Africa 3181

Instead of You

Laurence Donaghy

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor, with Ace

'Get up, Ace! Come on!'

It was him. Of course it was him. He dragged her to her feet and

somehow removed her cumbersome backpack all in one smooth motion,

throwing it over his own back. His hand gripped hers like steel as he

dragged her into another sprint.

Above them, the Kryian pods had reached the height of their arc and

were embarking on an entirely new, stunningly brief trajectory. She knew

this without even looking up.

'There it is!' he hollered. The familiar squat blue shape was there, twenty

feet from them, revealed by the dip of the land. 'We can make it!'

Her body believed him even if her mind didn't. When a person is

running for their life, there is no semblance of grace or technique to

their movements. Ace's legs and arms pumped in a way that would have

horrified the true athletes of the cosmos, not least because she would have

been outpacing them by some distance.

The TARDIS was indestructible. When its old wooden doors closed, she

had come to realise, not a thing in the universe could hurt her. Including,

and this was vitally important, the thirty or so highly explosive semi-

organic rocket pods hurtling down towards them.

For an instant she was at the door, hammering helplessly in panic; a flash of the Professor beside her, his TARDIS key arrowing toward its target; a noise all around them of death, descending.

And then fire, and air, and the sensation of being shoved by a giant hot hand into the TARDIS interior. She skidded to a halt beside the main console and, through hazy irising vision and a charitable fraction of consciousness, she discerned his silhouette, thumping controls on the console even as the mini-pods detonated outside and great licks of flame shot into their sanctuary through the still-open TARDIS doors.

Darkness.

She dreamed of time and space and the Professor. She kept getting sent back in time by a fraction of a second until there were a million billion Aces all filling the universe, all sporting backpacks full ofNitro-9.

She saw the Professor with a lit match and a strange smile, standing atop a great mountain of Aces. He held a stick of Nitro in his other hand.

Ace - the real Ace - tried to stop him, tried to say something, but she was sluggish and helpless; just as she always was in her dreams.

'Always knew I'd end up doing this,' he said, lighting the Nitro and dropping it with a smile.

'NO!'

* * *

Familiar surroundings greeted her. She was awake again, in her room on

the TARDIS. The Doctor stood nearby. He wasn't looking at her and his

body language was wrong for someone maintaining a vigil, she noted, but

he was there nonetheless waiting for her to come round.

'Ah, Ace!' he beamed, a smile flashing across his features. 'Good to have

you back. Come along!'

He was out of the room before she could reply. For a moment she just

stared at the doorway. Her right leg was aching, and - ouch - a mere finger-

touch to her temple told her she had a bump coming up there.

He seriously expects me to jump up and follow him just like that? Ace thought,

as she got up and followed him.

'We've got a problem,' he told her as she entered the main console

room.

'What is it?' she said, all semi-rebellious thoughts dismissed. He was

concerned, she could see that His hand was absently moving along a

control panel. She wondered if he even knew he was petting it

'The TARDIS is damaged.'

'But... I thought the TARDIS was indestructible?'

He looked pained. 'To all intents and purposes, yes,' he said quickly. 'But

the blast from those pods threw us inside and stopped the doors

closing.

The TARDIS was exposed for a few moments. To stop us being baked alive,

it had to re-route the blast energy...' he broke off. Ace realised that he was

actually feeling guilty at the TARDIS's sacrifice for their sakes.

'So can we fix it? The damage?'

The Doctor was burying himself in control panels, 'I'm assessing the

extent of it now,' he said grimly. 'Hang on. We'll be landing in a second...'

His voice grew m u f f l e d as he crawled inside.

'Any idea where?'

'Anywhere but Kryian!' came the response.

'Suits me,' she muttered.

A few moments later she was stepping through the TARDIS doors,

holding her breath a little as she had come to do. This was life with the

Doctor - dodging death and mayhem by a hair - but you couldn't replicate

the thrill *of feeling* the TARDIS settle on a point in space-time and opening

those doors to the great unknown.

A snowflake landed square on her top lip, a little bite of cold. She moved

further out, her smile broadening with each step. The Doctor appeared

behind her, his umbrella in his hand.

'What date is it?' she asked. She wanted to guess, but hardly dared to.

'December 24th 1889,' he responded. 'And down there... is old London

town.'

She beheld it in wonder, remembering how sometimes the streets of

London could be overrun with litter and grime, and yet a snowfall could

erase all of that and make the whole world seem pristine and white.

innocent and clean and good. So it was here. Victorian London was awash

with huge great chimneys pumping out great clouds of blackness that

ordinarily would have made this city a soot-covered boil of humanity.

But not today. Today the great city gleamed.

'It's Christmas Eve?' she said.

'Indeed,' the Doctor replied. There was still concern in his voice, but for

Ace all thoughts of the TARDIS's damaged systems had vanished into the

softly falling flakes and the Yuletide panorama before her.

She hardly dared to ask if they had time to go there, but she needn't

have worried; soon they found themselves winding through the streets

of London. Carollers stood on occasional corners regaling passers-by.

The markets - so many of them! - were a teeming hive of humanity and

animals, doomed geese milling frantically alongside the less seasonal

chickens and pigs.

Ace caught herself looking out for small boys on crutches being carried

home shoulder-high by their poor but proud fathers. She shook it off, with

difficulty. It may have looked like a scene from a Christmas card, but

this

was reality - warts, tuberculosis and all. Some of these people were clearly

starving. She had to turn away many beggars, most of them children;

trying to explain to them that the only currency she had in her pockets was

a Kryian 100 forto note didn't seem to work.

And for all its beautifying prowess, snow wasn't as effective at masking

smells...

Forcing herself to stop dwelling on such things, something struck her.

'Professor?'

'Yes?'

'If it's Christmas tomorrow, are we going to have a proper Christmas

dinner then?'

He cocked his head at her. 'Christmas tomorrow?' he repeated, not

struggling very hard to keep a condescending tone from his voice. 'Ace,

my dear, we're time travellers. It could be May 15th tomorrow. It could be

October 2nd. Or the 426th day of the Glorious Lunar Cycle of Firzong VI

for that matter... '

'If it's Christmas Eve today it's Christmas tomorrow,' Ace said stubbornly.

'Stands to reason.'

'Really.'

'Yes, really.'

He shrugged. 'I'm sure the TARDIS can prepare someth-'

'We're in a market! We could get some money from the TARDIS and buy

all the stuff here. Have a proper Christmas dinner.'

He looked around at their surroundings. 'Or we could just start drinking

from the toilets and save time?' he suggested.

Conversation was rather stilted on the way back to the TARDIS.

Ace closed the doors, glaring pointless daggers at the Professor's back.

He was oblivious to them, as usual. How could he be so cavalier about this?

Her life wasn't normal by any stretch of the imagination, and that suited

her just fine. The universe was her oyster. She wouldn't have swapped that

for anything. But Christmas...

Christmas was different. Christmas was universal. Couldn't he see

that?

Maybe he didn't. He was an alien, after all. He looked human and he

acted it... well, most of the time; but he wasn't, and that was that. Maybe

he didn't understand what the true meaning of Christmas really was; a

mountain of presents, three tons of food, and *very* carefully selected members

of your friends and family.

'Another quick landing,' he called from inside the console. 'I'm still

trying to lock down the damage.'

She muttered something rude under her breath.

'Yes, I imagine that would be painful,' he called cheerfully. 'Right... here

we go.'

The central console rose and fell rhythmically, comfortingly. She could

detect nothing amiss with how it sounded. Could he be wrong about the

TARDIS? Was that possible?

'Ace,' he called, still inside the console. There was something in his tone

that told her he was worried. 'Go outside for a second and tell me what you

see, will you?'

She opened the doors and stepped through, and stared.

'Wicked,' was all she could say.

The contrast with Victorian London couldn't have been more dramatic.

Snow-covered cobbled streets had been replaced with a wide open

boulevard bathed in sunshine. Hundreds of people replaced with many

thousands; the sedate pace of the occasional carriage gone, in its place

eight lanes of impossibly sleek, unfeasibly aerodynamic cars zipping past

ludicrously fast.

They had materialised inside a toy shop, although to call it that was like

calling an iceberg an icicle. The TARDIS was against one of the floor-to-

ceiling glass windows allowing them to view the cityscape outside. Ace

had to squint to try and make out the far end of the shop. The scale was

incredible. Toys of every shape, size and description burst from the shelves

in every direction.

She felt sure that having a small squat blue box materialise in their midst

would have caused a panic amongst the crowds thronging around them,

but no. No one seemed to notice their arrival or care about it even if they

had.

One little boy had stopped, however. He was all of around nine years old.

His clothes shone. He glared at Ace. His mother stood behind him, wearing

an expression that fell some way between harried and apologetic. She was

laden with bags to such an extent that it was difficult to tell where person

ended and plastic began.

'Well?'

Ace was taken aback. She'd never emerged from the TARDIS and had

someone have expectations of her. 'Well what?' she shot back.

'Get on with it. This is another *weak* McHenry's stunt, right? So what?'

the boy said, walking around the TARDIS with an expression of disgust.

'What are you promoting? Some stupid box? Lame. What does it do?'

'Are you gonna let him talk to strangers like that?' Ace asked the boy's

mother. 'You're his mum - belt him!'

'My mom?' the boy asked incredulously. 'This isn't my mom!'

'I'm his personal shopper,' the girl explained. She had the decency to

look embarrassed.

'His what?'

'HO, HO, HO!'

Ace almost fell backward into the TARDIS, barely managing to persuade

her fingertips to cling to the door-edges. Looming over her, over the entire

shop floor it seemed, was a massive visage of Santa Claus. She had seen

enough with the Professor to recognise a hologram when she saw one;

but never had she seen such an impressive specimen, not even on worlds

supposedly much further down the timeline than this.

'DON'T FORGET KIDS - STEEL SWORD OF HADES 3 FOR THE GAMEBOX

4000, IN STOCK ON THE VIDEO GAMES FLOOR! RUDOLPH AND

I WON'T BE GETTING YOU ONE, SO GET THERE NOW OR YOUR

FRIENDS ARE ALL GONNA BE LAUGHING 'COS THEY HAVE ONE

AND YOU DON'T! MERRY CHRISTMAS!' His massive belly shook like a

bowlful of free-floating photonic jelly, and he was gone.

'Come on!' the little boy said, jumping up and down with impatience.

'Let's go now! Now, now, now!'

Ace met the wretched girl's eyes once more before she was dragged at a

half-run in pursuit of the boy.

'Gives new meaning to you'd better u;atch out,' the Doctor murmured

beside her.

And over it all, though a public address system now rather than a few

hardy singers, the lilting, unmistakable sound of carols. It sounded tinny

and distant, and every few seconds it was interrupted by a bulletin about

the availability of some product or other.

'It's Christmas again,' Ace said, rather numbly.

'I know.' He didn't look thrilled. 'Los Angeles, December 24th, 2023 to

be exact.'

'Christmas Eve again?' she said. 'What are the odds?'

'Assuming we're calibrating on an Earth-standard Gregorian calendar,

one in 365.25. But that's not the half of it...'

He disappeared back inside the TARDIS as he talked. Ace followed.

'What's wrong?'

'Partial temporal coordinate lock,' he replied, balancing his umbrella on

the tip ofa finger. 'No matter where we go in space, the TARDIS is partially

frozen into real-time temporal advancement'

Catching her none-the-wiser expression, he went on. Think of it like

gears in a car. You use a different gear to go from 40 to 50 than to go from

o to 10, correct?'

'S'pose... '

'Well, the TARDIS's first gear is gone. We can go from century to century,

year to year, but not day to day or week to week. We're frozen on -'

'- Christmas Eve,' Ace finished for him, unable to keep the smile from

her face. 'Are you telling me no matter where we go, it's always going to be

Christmas Eve?'

The Doctor checked his watch. 'For the next 14 and a half hours at any

rate. Time inside the TARDIS is moving in real-time, as it always does.'

'So are you telling me, Professor,' said Ace, thoroughly enjoying every

single syllable of what she was about to say, 'that even for time travellers like

us, if it's Christmas Eve today, it'll be Christmas Day tomorrow?'

The umbrella was snatched from the air by his free hand. He glanced at

her quickly and looked away. She could see him bristle in annoyance. 'If

you want to put it like that...' he said, sulkily. Before she could say anything

more he turned on his heels and disappeared inside the TARDIS again.

After a pause, she followed.

'Not to worry,' he called behind him, 'We need an intertertiary accelator

compensator unit, and I know just the time period to obtain one. Hold

tight.'

'What, we're going? Already?' she said. 'But I wanted to -'

'Shop?'

It was her turn to bristle. The way he'd said it, Ace may as well have

proposed they stick around to commit a few war crimes and club some baby seals. 'I've never been to LA,' she said defensively.

He simply shook his head. 'We have work to do to repair the TARDIS.'

'Scrooge,' she muttered.

He smiled that disarming smile, the one that usually made her forget why she was angry.

'Now,' and he stepped forward and closed the TARDIS doors with a definitive, end-of-discussion snap, 'ready?'

She pointedly didn't reply to him by way of reply. He ignored her ignoring him, and moments later the TARDIS was on its way again.

'Never mind,' he said cheerfully, breaking the silence. 'As you pointed out, thanks to our partial temporal coordinate lock, wherever we land it'll be Christmas Eve there too.'

'It's got to be better than the last two,' she replied.

'A few too many poor people and spoiled brats?' he asked.

'What's that meant to mean?'

'You hold Christmas up as some great spiritual event, and yet what is it except a time when you crave gifts and stuff yourselves with food? Just because there's nice music playing in the background and a shiny tree in the room doesn't make it a shining beacon of humanity.'

Her first instinct was to deny it, to snort and tell him how wide of the mark he was. And then, one of her own thoughts resurfaced to betray her: Maybe he didn't understand what the true meaning of Christmas

really was; a

mountain of presents, three tons *of food, and very* carefully selected members of your *family.*

She said nothing. During the remainder of the trip she steamed quietly.

He didn't understand. Yes, so he had a point, but that wasn't the point.

She just didn't know how to express herself, how to make him see he

was wrong. But who knew - maybe their next destination, their next

Christmas, would show him.

They landed. That hope lasted as long as it took her to open the TARDIS

doors.

'My God,' she breathed. The strength fled from her limbs.

They had landed in hell.

'Virginia?'

Yes, Mother?

'Virginia,' her mother repeated aloud. 'Use your mouth.'

Why? This is much easier.

'Too easy,' her mother said, annoyance in her tone now as well as in her

mind. 'Too often and you'll forget how to talk entirely. Are you ready?'

'Yes... Mother,' Virginia said, dragging the sentence out unnecessarily.

She took the container from her mother and winked at her little brother

Spyrin - who regarded her with unbridled hero worship as always. Then

she tugged aside the flimsy curtain that served as their dwelling's inner

door.

The storms were at level 18 today. She threw on her protective coverings

and fixed the windproof straps securely, as she'd been taught to do in

outfits of increasing sizes since she could walk. She nodded to a few of

their neighbours and mind-brushed them in greeting. Then she stepped

through the double doors that formed the airlock-like exit from this tiny

outcrop of human life. The life-support dome over the hamlet was all that

prevented her and the other ten families huddled there from being blasted

to oblivion.

Virginia stepped out into the region her ancient ancestors had termed

the 'endless plains': the Serengeti. Now it was the endless desert; a

lifeless, pitiless landscape swept by gales propelling fine grains of detritus

at a speed that could wear away metals in the space of a few hours. She may

as well have been walking on the surface of Mars.

A mile and a half outside the dome's border, a power generator used the

neverending energies of the storms to produce electricity. Every 37 hours

the power it produced had to be dumped to the portable capacitor she was

carrying around her back. Work was continuing on the construction of an

underground cable to do this job automatically, but until then... 'the Walk'

was shared amongst those of age to complete it

This was her life. This was all of their lives. Once, the village Olders were

so fond of saying, things had been different. Before the invasion, before

Earth had been remade, the storms had not existed. But for the last three

generations, she and her colony had huddled here, alone.

No. Not alone.

A shape was forming out of the dust. Fear gripped her, and she felt her

emotion radiate outwards and touch her mother, her brother, the rest of

her family and friends, and bounce back to her with an answering reflected

tension and - from the Olders - a reassurance. There had been no animals

outside their habitation dome in this region of Earth for many decades.

Whatever it was, it was not alive. It could not be alive.

And then it split into two.

And they moved towards her and lunged.

Panic overwhelmed her; the panic of her mother, too far away to help

her daughter, the panic of the Olders as their knowledge was proven

incorrect... a tide of high emotion washed through her and made her turn

and try to flee.

Made her fall.

The fall ripped one of her windproof fasteners loose. She felt an incredible sensation of burning, and then a merciful blackness.

'She's hurt!' Ace yelled. 'We have to help her!'

The Doctor was already pressing forward. Neither he nor Ace were encumbered by environment suits. After much rummaging in 'storage' rooms in the mysterious backways of the TARDIS, he had emerged with personal force-field generators for them both. Strapped to their upper arms, they diverted the incredible dust-storms and made it possible to walk unaided through the swirling vortex.

This wasn't hell. It was Earth. All the Doctor would tell her was that they were a long time from home.

They pulled the girl to her feet. 'Come closer; the fields will reinforce,' the Doctor instructed her. Ace did so and sure enough, the blue spheres surrounding them converged and grew, forming a wind-free bubble that encompassed the fallen girl. The Doctor lifted her to her feet and manoeuvred one of her arms around his shoulders; Ace did the same on the other side.

'She won't have come far,' he said, squinting into the distance. Nothing could be seen. Ace thought she saw his eyes glaze over slightly. He pointed. 'There.'

He was right. They had gone barely one hundred feet when a large

shadow loomed over them. Smaller shadows revealed themselves to be

more people dressed like the girl they supported between them. Ace felt

suspicious eyes on her and something else; a strange kind of pressure inside

her head. She had the image of invisible hands knocking on her skull as

if it were a door...

Through hand signals - the suits these people wore lacked mouthpieces

- they were motioned to go through a dustlock system. A strong vacuum

sucked all stray dust particles from the people's suits and the outer doors

slammed shut. The others began to remove their garments. The Doctor

deactivated his field bubble with a flick of his fingers. Ace did the same.

Despite the gesture of trust, his eyes were alert.

The inner doors slid open and an older woman rushed forward in a way

that told Ace instantly she was the unconscious girl's mother.

'She's all right,' Ace said quickly. 'She's breathing. We got to her

before...'

Hands grabbed her, grabbed the Doctor. The nameless pressure she

was feeling grew. A man glared deep into her eyes, before an expression of

puzzlement overtook him and, to her wonder, not a small amount of fear.

'You're not connected,' he said. At some unspoken signal, both were released. He looked at his companions, at the girl's mother. Silence reigned until Ace could stand it no longer.

'Connected to what?' she asked.

'They're psychically linked to one another,' the Doctor said quietly. 'Everyone is. It's a modification entered into the human genetic code.'

Despite their precarious situation, Ace had time to be impressed. 'No way. Seriously?'

The girl was awake now, being cradled by her mother, who had tears streaming down her cheeks. The girl - she was no more than eight years old, Ace realised - looked at her mother and gently, slowly, but firmly made her let go. Ace was cheered to see such typically human behaviour from her.

'How can you not be connected?' the man spoke again. He was, it turned out, Speaker for the village.

'We're travellers,' the Doctor said. 'My spaceship is damaged. I came here to repair it.'

'Offworlders?' the Speaker said incredulously. A murmur of amazement went through the rest of the assembled crowd. Ace felt their gazes on her, especially that of the little girl, whose eyes were as wide as saucers.

'That's us,' Ace said cheerfully. 'Here for repairs and Christmas dinner, if that's okay?' This was met with frowns. 'Well,' Ace added quickly,

'maybe just repairs, then?'

'What is Christmas?' the little girl asked.

For an absurd moment, Ace felt like smiling. Her initial impression had

been correct This really *was* hell.

The Doctor had been locked in talks with the Olders for some time now.

Ace, meanwhile, had found a friend in Virginia. It seemed a crazily old

fashioned name for an eight-year-old in the year 3181, but then, next to

nothing about this time period seemed to make sense to Ace. Or perhaps

she simply didn't want it to.

'So let me get this straight,' she asked Belen, Virginia's mother. 'The

Earth was completely taken over by these... umm... '

'Huyfbfgriniotites.'

'... right. Huy...' Ace trailed off, 'I don't suppose they had a nickname?'

'None that I would repeat in front of Virginia,' Belen said levelly.

Ace blinked. Virginia giggled. 'Okay - and these aliens - enslaved the

entire population, reformed huge parts of the planet to be more like their

homeworld, stripped them of all natural resources, then just cleared o f f ? '

'Yes. They had taken what they came for,' Belen said, with a calm

acceptance that chilled Ace's bones.

'What about the people living in those places? What happened to

them?'

'I don't know,' Belen said, still unfazed. 'We cannot communicate with them. We light the central beacon each night to signal our survival. It reaches through the storms to low Earth orbit. But it has been 89 years since the Huyfbfgriniotites left, and no one has come.'

'How many?' she asked, unable to stop. 'How many of you - of us humans - are there left?'

'There are 53 people in this settlement. It is likely we are all that is left.'

Ace felt the bottom drop out of her world.

'Fifty-three people? On the entire planet?' she croaked.

Belen nodded. 'I must get back to my routines,' she said without hint of apology, neatly cutting the oxygen of the conversation just as another question was formulating in Ace's mind. 'We have work to do,' and she cast a meaningful glance at Virginia before bustling off into the back of the tiny house and to chores unknown.

Virginia rolled her eyes. Ace could have wept with relief at such a human gesture.

'So tell me where you're from,' Virginia said eagerly. 'What planet?'

Ace should have lied. Somehow, she couldn't.

'I'm from Earth. Not from this time. My ship... me and the man I travel with, we can travel through time and space. We're from the past. Well... I'm from the past. He's...' she trailed off. Trying to sum up the Professor was

like trying to fill a thimble with the Thames. 'He's more complicated.'

She expected the little girl to dismiss her claims out of hand, but

Virginia's eyes simply goggled until Ace was sure they were about to roll

out of her head and drop to the floor.

Only later did Ace reflect that the girl's lack of disbelief should have

alerted her that something was amiss, but by then it was far too late.

'What is your time like?'

Ace felt pity for this little thing standing before her, for whom even

the most soot-encrusted alley of Victorian London would have been

an impossible paradise. 'It's hard to know where to begin,' she said

awkwardly.

'Begin with Christmas,' Virginia said eagerly.

And so, Ace did. She told Virginia about the anticipation felt by children

as December approached. She described her own excitement as a child

over what Santa Claus would bring her that year. She recalled the rituals of

Christmas Eve: of laying out the biscuits and the milk, of going to bed early

and lying there listening hard for hoofbeats on the roof. Of waking up

the next morning and sprinting downstairs to behold the parcels left out,

then ripping open the wrapping paper. How Santa always knew everything

you wanted most. How you could stuff yourself with so much Christmas

dinner that you could only sit, bloated and happy, for the remainder

of the

afternoon.

Ace failed to tell Virginia what she felt like screaming at the Doctor; that

none - count 'em, none - of her own childhood Christmas experiences had

been like that.

And as soon as she had mentioned Santa - well, Virginia had a hundred

questions about him. Where does he live? What are reindeer? How do they

fly? What's a naughty list? How does he know what children want? How

does he get around them all on a single night? Ace answered them all as

she would have done for any child Virginia's age.

Then she heard the voices.

'He's coming tonight.'

'It's Christmas Eve today.'

'Santa is coming.'

Ace realised that the voices were coming from behind her, from the

entrance to Virginia's home. She turned.

They stood ten deep. Their faces rapt Children among them, yes, but

the majority were adults.

'Hello everyone. What's going on...' she said, feeling suddenly a little

dizzy.

It was Belen who came forward. She knelt before Ace and took her hand,

her eyes shining with tears. 'Thank you,' she said. 'We had lost hope. Our

food stocks are almost gone. The radiation sickness gets worse each cycle.

But now, we will be saved.'

'Saved...' Ace repeated numbly.

'Yes,' and to Ace's horror, it was the village Speaker now, as excited as

the rest of them. 'This saviour - he will come tonight Before, we did not

know the rituals. The knowledge had been lost But now we know them we

can bring them to life again. Santa Claus will bring us food and medicine.

It was what we want m o s t And we have all been good, have we not?'

A rousing chorus of Yes! resounded from the ragged band of colonists.

'Come!' the Speaker addressed his throng. 'We have preparations to

make. Lists must be written. And the offerings: biscuits need to be baked,

milk procured and distributed appropriately. And we have a chimney to

build!'

The crowd cheered and dispersed, leaving only the Doctor, standing

with his arms folded, staring at her. There was a long silence.

'Interesting consequence of the continual telepathy,' he said

conversationally. They seem to have completely forgotten what a lie is.

But,' and he paused significantly. 'I have a feeling you may already have

realised that.' In response, all she could do was nod.

They had Belen's house to themselves.

Everyone else was busy. Ace was trying very hard indeed not to think about what they were doing. She was failing.

The argument had been building for some time. That didn't make it any more pleasant. But then, it never did.

'We've got to do something,' Ace blurted, when she could stand it no longer.

'We saved the little girl's life.'

'We made her fall in the first place! That doesn't count and you know it!'

'What do you want us to do?'

'Fix the TARDIS and we'll go back and stop me running my mouth off about Christmas!'

'We can't do that, Ace.'

She'd known this was coming. 'Why?'

'Because it's done. And I can't undo a causality chain and potentially cause a temporal paradox simply because you feel guilty.'

She glowered at him. 'Can't, or won't?'

'It doesn't matter,' he sighed and, not for the first time, she could see some evidence of the centuries of age that weighed on him. 'It's not your fault, Ace. You didn't know what you were doing when you told these people about jolly old Saint Nick. I have the part we need to fix the TARDIS.

Let's make our excuses and get back.'

'We can't just leave!' Ace exploded. 'I caused this! I have to tell them!'

'What are you going to say? "Don't be daft, Virginia, of course there's no

such thing as Santa Claus?"'

'If I have to!'

She barged out of the house. The supertensile biometallic alloy that

formed the skin of the dome billowed far overhead. The whole structure

was like a giant circus tent, with smaller structures of the same material

forming houses inside. The village was *the* very essence of practicality. It

was functional, necessary for survival. Then sudden tears stung her eyes.

They had *decorated* it

Lights hung from each flap of the fabric. Every shiny piece of metal the

townspeople had been able to lay their hands on had been procured and

added to the display. And in the centre of the town...

They had cobbled it together from bits of piping, from scrap, and from

the memories of the oldest Olders who could remember the days before

the Huyfbfgriniotites came and such things had existed for real. It was

twisted, it was ugly as hell.

But it was, unmistakably, a tree.

As she watched, a pulley and anti-grav system working in tandem

lowered the ultrabeam searchlight onto the pinnacle of the structure.

This was the beacon that Belen had told Ace about. The children had found spare pieces of superconducting darkcells and fixed them to the searchlight's surface, with the shape of a five-pointed star left uncovered in the centre.

'Turn it on!' came the shout.

It shone upward, through the transparent communication dome at the peak of the dome and into the darkening evening sky beyond. It would go all the way to orbit. There would be a star in the Christmas night over this forsaken planet.

He was at her her side. She felt his hand rest on her shoulder.

'Still want to tell them?' he asked softly.

Virginia ran breathlessly up to them. 'What do you think?'

'Amazing,' was all Ace could say.

'What's wrong with your eyes?' Virginia asked.

'She's tired,' the Doctor interjected. 'It's perfect, Virginia. You've done very well.'

Virginia beamed. 'Thank you.'

Ace found her voice. 'Virginia, I...'

'Everyone has left out what milk we have. We don't have any cows or goats l e f t Do you think Santa will mind if it's dog's milk?'

'Oh my God-'

The Doctor smiled dazzlingly. 'That'll be fine, Virginia. Run along.

You've got a list to write and he's got his list too. And be careful. He'll be

quite thorough in his assessment of his list He may even check it twice.'

Ace waited until she was gone.

'Kill me. Kill me, now.'

'Not likely,' the Doctor replied absently. He was fiddling with the part he

needed to fix the TARDIS. The stupid part that had caused them to come to

this stupid time and made her say all of those stupid things...

'Will you leave that thing alone!' Ace snapped, snatching it from him.

There was a spark of orange electricity that snaked up her arm. For a

moment she felt energised beyond belief, as if every single cell in her body

had been ordered to do a six-mile jog simultaneously.

And then, having completed the jog, every cell collapsed into an

exhausted heap.

The Doctor knelt by her and checked her pulse. It was strong. Strong as

ever. What a remarkable young woman she was.

'You were right,' he whispered to her, before calling a few of the

townspeople over. 'Can you help me get her to a bed?'

'What happened to her?' Virginia asked, concerned, as a few of the men

lifted her new friend's unconscious body from the ground. 'Is she okay?'

'Oh, she does this every Christmas Eve. All the excitement I think. Get

her to a bed and keep an eye on her. She'll be fine in the morning. And all

of you, get to bed too. By all accounts not only can the big man observe you

whilst you sleep, he's fully cognisant of when you're affecting a simalcrum

of that state. Or something like that... '

With that, the Doctor began to walk away toward the dustlock.

'You're not staying, Doctor?' the Speaker called after him. 'Aren't you

worried about missing Santa?'

'I have something to do,' the Doctor replied, activating his force field.

'It may take a little time.' With that, he paused and smiled. 'Or it may take

just one night. Merry Christmas to you all.'

The inner doors closed behind him, and he was gone.

She could hear the screams, the anger, the outrage. They were all pointing

at her, all accusing, shouting her name, calling for her to be cast out

without her force field into the dust and have the skin scoured from her

bones in a microsecond.

All except Virginia, who simply stood and stared at her with such

betrayal as Ace was carried away to the dustlock.

'Ace!'

Screams and bedlam. It hadn't been a dream. It had been a premonition.

Belen's hut swam into view around her, and she made out the figures of

Belen, of Virginia and oflittle Spyrin, all standing there...

Smiling. They were smiling.

No, they were *beaming.*

And Ace saw it everywhere on the floor. She bent down to pick some ofit

up and crumpled it between her numb, disbelieving, this-isn't-happening

fingers. It was shiny, and sticky.

'It's wrapping paper,' she said, her voice coming from somewhere far

away.

'Yes. From the presents,' Virginia said helpfully.

Little Spyrin tottered forward. 'I gotta monster!' he announced, holding

up a red fluffy thing of indeterminate species. 'Watch!' he bellowed, still

unused to vocalising over telepathy, and set the monster on the floor,

pressing its stomach.

Ace watched as it tumbled and fell and capered and guffawed. It was the

most impressively pointless display she had ever witnessed, and it held

little Spyrin absolutely and completely spellbound in joy.

She started to laugh. She started to cry.

Moments later, she staggered out of the tiny little homestead and into

the tiny little town bedecked with the world's most makeshift Christmas

decorations. People were running toward each other, embracing. More

than a few were weeping. Children were holding swords, bears,

assorted

baubles. She saw a little girl who had never seen a tiara and heels set before

in her life and stopped for a moment to show her how to wear them.

She was picked up and spun around.

'Medicine!' the Speaker said, his voice weak. 'Our stocks are full to

bursting! And food - such food! We have more than enough to last us ten

full seasons! Look at this! Look!'

He handed her a warm plastic pot with an oddly familiar smell curling

up from inside.

'Taste! You must taste!'

She simply smiled and handed it back to him. 'No thanks,' she said,

and seeing his disbelief added, 'I always preferred chicken and mushroom

flavour anyway.'

With a shrug, and another hearty slap, he was gone to rejoin the

festivities.

It took her ten minutes to find the Doctor. He was standing with his

hands behind his back, staring into the skies through the hole at the peak

of the dome.

'Ace,' he clucked, shaking his head. 'You shouldn't grab intertertiary

accelerator compensator circuits. Didn't they cover that in school?' He

didn't wait for an answer. 'The TARDIS is fixed. Perfect working order,

you might say. Did you know some of the children are saying they heard

sleigh bells last night? Can you believe that? Sleigh bells. Unless Mr Claus

has taken to driving a neutronium sleigh with armour-plated reindeer, I

would doubt it myself. But they don't. And so no one will. Oh...' He rolled

his eyes at an exaggerated self-rebuke. 'I almost forgot.'

He brought his hands around.

'For me?' she asked.

'Who else?'

She took the parcel from him, not trusting herself to speak for a

moment. There was a gift tag attached to it, with a message.

For Ace - my *beacon* of humanity.

'I feel bad,' she said, as they began to walk to the dustlock, to slip away

before the revellers noticed they were gone.

'Why's that?'

'I haven't got anything to give you.'

'Do you honestly believe that?' he asked her. But as they stepped into the

dustlock and the inner doors swooshed shut on the town, his smile faded.

'Ace...' he said quietly. They walked out into the harsh landscape of the

world, of the cosmos, the dust of war swirling all around them, the only

light the artificial star shape high in the skies above. 'We won't be here

next Christmas.'

Shapes loomed out of the dust; ten at least, closing in from all sides.

They were protected by force fields much like those she and the Doctor

wore.

The Doctor smiled. 'But they will.'

'Who are these people?' she asked.

'Survivors!' the nearest man to her boomed. 'It's true! I don't believe it.'

'Are there more of you?'

'Over fifty in the dome,' the Doctor said, pointing. They don't have

fields, just suits.'

'We brought spares! We never would have known your beacon wasn't

just another automated relic if you hadn't changed its shape like that

- good thinking!'

The newcomers pressed on to the dustlock mechanism, leaving a

dumbfounded Ace with the Doctor standing alone once again. They had

reached the TARDIS by now and the Doctor was already unlocking the

doors. 'But I thought..' Ace began.

'You thought the whole planet was covered in the storms?' the Doctor

completed for her. 'No. Just a few regions like this one.'

'You knew that? And you didn't tell me?' Conflicting emotions raged

through her as she watched the rescuers, guided by the star above, vanish

into the dome and imagined the scenes of jubilation within. 'What else are

you not telling me, Doctor?'

But he had already gone, back into the TARDIS. Ace watched for one moment longer before following.

Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you – all of you on the good Earth.'

In 1968, Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and William Anders became the first men to spend Christmas in space. They sent live images back home, closing with the words 'Good night, good luck, a

Planet Gloricious 2172

Christmas Every Day

Jason Arnopp

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Leela

Down here, beneath the Great Tree, Christmas morning was dark, dismal

and shot through with dread.

Three long corridors led away from this central point, their furthest

ends dimly dappled by the sun's tantalising rays. Carved into the ice, these

narrow pathways gradually sloped upwards towards an outside world

which Freeman knew he would never see again. These bindings were too

tight, strapping his wrists and ankles to each side of this metallic box.

Hundreds had failed to escape the Kings - why should he be any different?

The thought of what was about to happen made his insides churn.

He breathed deeply, trying to stay calm, only to issue small, staccato

gasps: he could hear them. Sibilant giggles echoed down one corridor,

then another. Long, distorted shadows appeared at the far end of each.

They were coming for him.

'Merrrrry Christmas,' said King I, its voice as ever a grim helium rasp.

'Oh looky, looky look,' said King II, drawing closer. 'We has a present.

We likes presents, we does!'

The shadows drew longer. As their silhouettes advanced, he saw *the*

glistening of their reptilian eyes. The yellow-whites of their teeth.

By the time he could smell them - that rank, cloying stench - Freeman

wished he was dead. As they laughed and clapped their scaly, clawed paws

together, he thought about his 25 years in this life and wished they had

been more impressive. More complete. There was so much left to do. His

only consolation could be that he was helping his people. Yes, that would

be his dying thought

'Can't waits no more,' trilled King I, reaching out for Freeman.

'Hungry,' growled King II.

'We doesn't have to waits,' tittered King III, quickly shifting its balance

from one leg to the other, like a jubilant dance. We never does. We mades

it so. When each sun-up, it am Christmas mornin' for us and we gets

presents! We, the Kings, mades it so. Good plans! Hee hee. So no waits

for us. We unwraps it'

Up on ground level, anyone who dared walk by the Great Tree did

so at speed. Desperately trying to ignore the screams of today's victim,

which drifted up from the depths below. The glottal chant of 'Unwraps it!

Unwraps it!' The click and clack of teeth and jaws. Occasional arguments

between Kings.

For all the Great Tree's lavish, towering splendour, *the* only glance it

ever attracted from the people of Colony 12 was one of dread.

'Doctor, please listen to me. No more Christmas. Do I have to beg?'

Leela stood with hands on hips, shaking her head at the man she

travelled with. The Doctor was slumped forward in a high-backed wicker

chair in one corner of the TARDIS console room. His brightly coloured

party hat had long since drifted to the ground. On his lap sat a party-

blower and a paper plate of plum-pudding crumbs.

She greatly respected him, no question. Yet he could be such a child.

Sometimes, this made her angry. She marched over and grabbed one of his

shoulders, shaking until that great mop of curls slowly rose. One bleary

eye flickered open and slowly focused on her. A faint, unreadable smile

on those lips.

'What's the matter?' he whispered.

'Christmas. I have had enough.'

'Quite right too!' The Doctor yelled, launching himself from the chair,

startling her as he marched across this confined space to the console.

Whenever Leela was surprised, her hand still flashed to the hilt of

her hunting knife. The Sevateem warrior could never afford to lose

that instinct, no matter how much the Doctor chided her for carrying a

weapon.

He was peering at the lights and panels. 'Too much Christmas really

can't be a good thing, can it?'

'That's not what you've been saying for the last -'

'Twelve days of Christmas, yes. Every once in a while, you really need a

Christmas binge. Good for the soul. And weren't they tremendous days?

Hmm? I'd always wanted to do that - 1 2 on the trot'

'I enjoyed the first four Christmases,' admitted Leela. 'The third was very

good, with the singing in Austria.'

The Doctor nodded fondly, in recollection. 'Ah, yes. Silent Night,

performed for the first time. 1818 was a very good year. A year with hints

of musk and cinnamon, undercut with just a soupcon of -'

'I did not enjoy it all so much, when I realised I'd be carving the

Christmas meat every day.'

'But you're so very good at it.' The Doctor's smile faded, his mind

drifting from their conversation, towards whatever the console readings

were telling him. He spun around to Leela, indignant

'Why didn't you tell me we'd landed?'

'I did not know. Where are we? And is it Christmas there?'

The Doctor shook his head, as he pulled on his scarf and coat.

'The planet Gloricious, 2172 AD. One of the smaller baubles in the

Zander Spiral. I've never had the pleasure, but I very much doubt they've

even heard of Christmas.'

Leela still had her arms folded. 'I am warning you, Doctor: if I am

offered any more sherry... or see one more piece of misletine...'

The Doctor chuckled. 'Mistletoe, Leela. Mistletoe. Now come on.'

He opened the TARDIS's doors, snatched his hat from the coat-stand

and was gone in a flurry of hair and tweed.

'Leela, I can only apologise.'

The Doctor was standing just outside the TARDIS, bemused and lashed

by fluffy snow, gazing over the glacial vista. Behind him, Leela peered out

of the blue box and ground her teeth.

'I assure you this wasn't deliberate,' he said, keeping his back to her. 'Do

me a favour, would you? Try to resist stabbing me, there's a good savage.'

Leela walked reluctantly over to stand beside the Doctor. There were

simple, hardy buildings as far as the eye could see, their roofs coated

with snow and windows glistening with multicoloured lights. This vast

cityscape stretched across a dead-flat surface, then curled around white-

capped mountains on the horizon. Right in the centre, was a Christmas

tree. While Leela was relatively inexperienced in yuletide matters, this was

by far the biggest, most festive tree she had ever seen. She'd seen asteroids

smaller than those shiny baubles, while the tinsel was thicker than fully-

grown Fendahl. The tree's uppermost peak was slightly blurred by wisps

of cloud.

The Doctor stuffed hands in both pockets. 'I really can't face any more

Christmas either. Shall we -'

The TARDIS door slammed shut behind them.

'Hello,' the Doctor said. 'How unusual.'

Leela's hand was on her knife. 'Was it the wind?'

The Doctor was about to point out that the door opened inwards, when

three armed men in dark green uniforms ran into view. The older and most

senior man, with a vivid scar across one cheek, threw the pair of them a

stern look and raised a hand for his men to stop.

The Doctor nudged Leela. She knew that nudge very well. It meant,

'Get your hand off the knife and smile.' So she did just that, to match the

Doctor's winning grin and wave.

'Nice day for running,' said the Doctor. 'Excellent for the constitution.'

'Did you see a fugitive?' barked the scarred man. 'Blond hair, blue eyes,

bleeding from the shoulder?'

'Afraid not,' shrugged the Doctor. 'Awfully sorry.'

The senior guard stared at the Doctor for a second. Then he broke back

into a run, the other men quickly following his lead.

The Doctor and Leela slowly turned, as one, to face the TARDIS.

'The blond man,' said Leela. 'He is in there.'

The Doctor nodded, thoughtful.

The fugitive was sitting on the floor, against one wall, a roundel framing

the top of his head like a halo. Any initial sense of wonder at the size

of

the TARDIS's console room had obviously been superseded by physical

pain - his face contorted, eyes wild, as he held his left upper arm. Fitting

the senior guard's descriptive sketch, he appeared to be in his mid forties

- that blond hair flecked with grey here and there.

The Doctor sat down beside him. 'Afternoon, old fellow,' he said. 'What

seems to be the matter?' He glanced up at Leela. 'You remember where the

med-box is?' She nodded and left the room.

The fugitive stared at the Doctor. 'Who are you?'

'I'm the Doctor. The nurse in the animal skins is named Leela. What's

your name? And what did you do to warrant all that shouting and shooting,

hmm? Looks like you were lucky to get off with a flesh wound.'

'Kamble. The whole thing's out of control. It's been out of control

since... they arrived.'

Leela reappeared with the med-box. She crouched on Kamble's other

side, snapped the box open and tried to remember what the Doctor had

told her about application.

'You're human,' said the Doctor. 'Is this an Earth colony?'

Kamble nodded, wincing as Leela cleaned up his bloody shoulder. 'We

settled here two years ago. After a year of organisation and building, we

realised that the ice-cap was melting fast, but had no way of leaving.'

'Oh dear,' the Doctor intoned. 'But that was a year ago?'

'Yes,' said Kamble. 'Then the Three Kings arrived on the last Christmas Day we thought we'd ever see. They ate our ruler, then saved us with their powers. And everything became worse. So much worse.'

'Shall I eat his head? Shall I? Hee hee!'

Security Officer Grey stood before the Kings, no less afraid for having become accustomed to their appearance. Sitting on golden, tinsel-lined thrones, the Kings resembled hideous, bloated children, who had been crossbred with red frogs. Their eyes blazed with mean spirit, their mouths fixed in permanent grins lined with cruel teeth. No more than four feet tall, their short, stubby legs ended where most human's knees would be - their clawed feet jutting out, just over the thrones' seats.

Their ugliness always seemed so at odds with their grotto's festive beauty. Built inside part of the Great Tree, which they had commandeered and customised themselves in those early, grim days, the grotto shone with the reflected light of green, red, silver, blue and gold decorations. The Tree's gargantuan trunk speared through the room's centre, like a supporting pillar. An enormous pile of bloody-grey human bones gathered around it, becoming larger every time he had the misfortune to pay them a visit.

As ever, Grey was determined not to show fear. They could smell it,

he was sure - and would be upon him if he showed weakness. He was always at pains to show absolute confidence and efficiency, even when his reserves were running low.

'No eatings of head yet,' said King II, in answer to King I's question. 'But p'raps we gifts him a new scar for that face.'

'We will find Kamble,' said Grey. 'He cannot run far.'

'How did he run-run-runs away?' King III wanted to know.

'He tricked a guard and escaped the transport vehicle,' said Grey, swallowing hard.' He was shot, but kept going.'

'Oh, I hope so,' said King II. 'Or he would make a very bad present for us tomorrow morning. Where's the fun-fun-fun in a dead gift? No fun without screams, oh no.'

'How,' asked King III, 'did he know he had been chosened?'

'Inside information in the prison,' shrugs Grey. 'This won't happen again.'

King I was staring out of a window. 'The sun becomes low, Mr Grey. You know what will happens if we have no present tomorrow, yes?'

Grey nodded. 'Yes, yes, I know. But we can bring you a different present A back-up!'

All three Kings' feet shook with dismay, their paws banging the arms of their thrones. 'No! No! We want that present!'

Despite himself, Grey took an involuntary step backwards.

'We gets our present,' said King I, catching its breath, 'or we stops our

mind-magics and this world does boil, yes? You sinks, we flies away. It's

your choice.'

Grey nodded emphatically. He bowed before them, then swept out of the

grotto, slapping his comms device against one side of his face.

'I need more men,' he barked. 'If we don't find Kamble by dawn, this is

the last Christmas we'll ever see.'

The Doctor, Leela and Kamble gazed across the city, as darkness began to

shroud Colony 12. The tree and the city-wide Christmas lights seemed to

sparkle all the brighter, but the Doctor felt no warmth from it all. He really

hadn't liked Kamble's story. Not one little bit

'How are they chosen?' he murmured.

Kamble looked ashamed. He was standing beside Leela now, with a

medi-pad hugging his shoulder. 'At first., there was a lottery...'

The Doctor turned on him, incredulous. 'A lottery? Random selection?'

Leela frowned hard. 'And the winner was taken to these Kings to die?

That was a very bad system.'

Kamble nodded. 'I know. But it seemed like the fairest way. How else can

60,000 people agree on which of them will die for the common good? We

were in a panic. The Kings had saved us by stabilising the planet, but..'

'There was a price,' said the Doctor.

T h e lottery was restricted to the over-18s, to preserve our future,'

said Kamble, half-heartedly. 'But then, after a horrible month, we hit on

another idea and the Kings agreed.'

'Criminals,' said the Doctor. 'You gave them criminals.'

'How did you know?'

T h e numbers on the back of your hand. You've just escaped prison.'

Leela regarded Kamble warily. 'What did you do?'

'I stole,' said Kamble. 'Food for my family.'

The Doctor rubbed his chin. 'I'm assuming that the system worked like

this - the most reprehensible, violent criminals first.'

Kamble nodded. 'Like a kind of death penalty.'

'It's exactly like a death penalty,' said the Doctor.

Thing is,' said Kamble, 'all the murderers have been given to the Kings.

Now it's the likes of me who get fed to them.'

'It's barbaric,' said the Doctor. 'And it can't continue.'

Leela braced herself for another near-death experience, her warrior

blood racing through her veins. 'What are you going to do?' she asked the

Doctor.

He swung his scarf tightly around his neck and the lower half of his face.

'I'm going to see these Kings. Stay here with Kamble.'

Leela's shoulders sagged. She hated being given this kind of job. Where

was the honour in it? 'Why can't we come too?'

The Doctor was already heading off along the track, towards the Great Tree. 'You heard what Kamble said,' he called back, over his shoulder. 'They want to eat him. Now get back inside the TARDIS.'

As he trudged along this path, his long coat dragging in the slush, the Doctor stopped a few colonists, one by one, asking them for directions to the Three Kings. In doing so, he noticed two things. One, the fear in their eyes. Two, the way in which hearing the words 'Three Kings' made them grimace - as if they were being reminded of something they really wanted to forget, like a terminal disease.

He made a point of telling them that everything was going to be all right - that they would be free by the following dawn. They seemed too frightened to respond, but they all pointed at the Great Tree.

Now that he knew the nature of the Kings and their terrible demands, their Tree resembled nothing so much as a carbuncle stretching up from the ground. Soon, at its foot, he gazed up at its many decorations, his eyes narrowing. Then, after circling it, he arbitrarily selected an entrance.

Rummaging around inside a coat pocket, he produced a small, plastic torch. He was grateful for even its weak light, as he stepped into the frigid corridor and the gloom swallowed him whole.

'Hoo, hoooo! Someone comes in of their own wish, they does!'

The Three Kings were perched on their thrones, gazing over at a large

scanner screen. A glowing orange heat source was clearly visible, moving

along one of the corridors.

The Doctor could only assume that this was an underground lair. Why did

so many monstrous types feel so at home beneath ground level? Oh yes, if

he had a jelly baby for every time he'd uncovered a subterranean hideout.

His torch picked out a metallic chamber, which seemed to be built into

the tree's trunk. Intriguing. Unlike the smell of death, which he always

found simply unpleasant. He considered how many people had already

died, while standing in this box. An horrendous thought.

Noting that the Tree's three entrance tunnels converged here, he

wondered if he had drawn a blank. Just to be sure, he stepped onto the

dirty metal floor.

'Ah,' he said, as thick metal shutters slammed down all around, penning

him in. 'Could this be...' There was whirring and grinding. The Doctor

sensed motion, steadying himself by holding the box's unpleasantly slick

walls. 'A lift,' he said. 'Yes, that's what it is. And it's going up.'

The Three Kings waited with interest to see their visitor. They were

bemused when he fired himself out of the lift like a blast from a pulse-rifle,

as if here to deliver an absolutely vital message.

'Oh, how very novel!' he said, pacing swiftly around the room. 'You've

no idea how much o f a change this makes for me. I'd assumed this would

be an underground lair, but how brilliant - a lair inside a Christmas tree.

A tree-house! I have to say, that's really quite special.'

The Kings just stared. The Doctor continued to pace, maintaining his

momentum and describing a wider circle now, which passed around

behind their thrones.

'I can see why Christmas Day appealed to you, upon your arrival,' he

said. 'A day of over-indulgence. A day with the potential for greed on a

massive scale. Why would you want that to end? Why not have it every day,

hmm?'

The Doctor stopped dead in his tracks before the Kings. Then finally

locked eyes with them.

'Only, Christmas is about giving as well as receiving. One aspect

which you've clearly chosen to ignore. And call me a dyed-in-the-wool

traditionalist if you really must, but Christmas is never about cold-blooded

killing.'

'Who am you?' demanded a livid King I.

'Oh, me? A little ray of sanity, breaking through into this world. I mean,

I hate to spoil Christmas, but you realise that you can't do this any more,

don't you? I mean, I can only assume you were hoping to get away with this

until someone like me came along. You're bullies, isolating another child

in one corner of the playground and hoping teacher won't notice. Well,' he

said, smiling broadly, 'Teacher has.'

The Kings emitted angry spittle as they all spoke at once.

'We am not childrens.'

'We am Kings.'

'You will respect us!'

The Doctor pointed contemptuously at the small mountain of bones.

'Respect for you died with these people. Now pack up and be gone.'

'If we leaves, the whole planet dies,' said King II. 'Is that what you

wants? Is it?'

'Let me worry about that,' said the Doctor.

The Kings shook with laughter.

'You hears that?' said King I. 'He am a god! A planet-saver.'

'Here am something for you, Mr God,' said King II, glancing first at

King I, then King III. 'One, two, three...'

The Doctor stood firm before them. Ready for anything.

Except, that was, for the scaly tongue which burst from each of the

Kings' mouths, shot towards his head at lightning speed like freakish

party-blowers and slapped him unconscious.

At first, as his eyes flickered back into operation, the heaviness of his head

suggested that he had been out for some time. Furthermore, it seemed that

he'd been buried up to his nose in snow. Then, being ever quick off the

mark, the Doctor realised that this white f l u f f y stuff didn't feel cold at all.

No, it was some form of synthetic material. To be precise, a beard.

The fact that he was wearing a false beard soon became secondary to his

physical position. The sky, which was dark but increasingly speared by the

dawn's rays, seemed worryingly close. When he looked down, the expanse

of Colony 12 stretched out a couple of hundred feet below his dangling,

black-booted feet.

The realisation soon struck: he had been dressed as Santa Claus, and

tied to the top of the Great Tree.

He was, at least, grateful for the warmth which the Santa costume

afforded him - it was handsomely padded, and the beard kept the frost

away from his chin. The Doctor didn't know whether it was due to his

advanced years, but his chin often became terribly, terribly cold. He

tended to rub it a lot, to compensate. He tried to move his arms and legs,

discovering that he could. He had been tethered to the Tree with a tough,

metallic band around his waist He ran his hands over the band, which

seemed smooth and perfectly unyielding.

Childish cackles drifted up through the tree from somewhere around its

middle. Irking him.

'Oh, very droll,' he yelled down. 'This is no way to treat a Time Lord.'

'A Time Lord, am he?' said one ofthe King's feint voices. 'Oh, what fun-

fun-funs. Watch, Time Lord, watch. Christmas twice! Christmas twice!'

The Doctor didn't care for that triumphant tone. It suggested someone

knowing something that he didn't, which was never desirable. He looked

down, past his Santa boots and the baubles and branches and tinsel, and

saw both Leela and Kamble in shackles, being led to the Great Tree by

armed men. The security chief from earlier presided over their delivery.

Colonists huddled around the Tree area's very perimeter in nervous

clusters, watching.

'I wouldn't do that, little Kings, if I were you,' yelled the Doctor.

The only answer was their spiteful chittering, which began to lessen in

volume.

'Doctor!'

Leela's voice rose up, but then she and Kamble were gone, led out of

sight beneath the Tree.

The Three Kings were climbing down. Swinging from bough to bough,

hanging on tinsel as if it were vines, they made it look effortless, moving

with a speed which belied their awkwardly proportioned physiques. They

were starving. And massively excited.

The Doctor harrumphed, and awkwardly fished inside one of his coat

pockets. He managed to drag out his sonic screwdriver, which he

activated, testing it out on his restraining waist-band. It failed to respond.

Tutting, he resorted to scanning his immediate vicinity. Worryingly, Leela

and Kamble had disappeared from view. They were now under the tree.

- presents, waiting to be consumed. He must be quick...

'Don't worry,' Leela told Kamble, strongly sensing his fear. It was much

the same feeling which had come from animals, just before she and her

Sevateem tribe members had pounced, securing their food for the next few

suns. 'The Doctor will come for us.'

'He's... stuck... on top ofthe tree,' he whispered, barely able to speak as

first one, then two, then all of the Kings appeared at each entrance. The

creatures' sadistic laughter began to echo along the corridors.

There was a huge bauble, just beneath the Doctor's feet. He clamped his

heels on either side of it Then, placing the kind of strain on his stomach

muscles that they hadn't felt in quite some time, he unhooked it from the

tree, raising it up in front of him. He couldn't maintain this for too long,

so frantically waved the sonic screwdriver in its general direction.

'Christmas twice. Christmas twice...'

The Kings' macabre chant grew louder as they drew closer, relishing the

fear. Leela was determined not to give them what they wanted.

'Come, little men,' she said. 'This is the coward's way, to tether your

enemy. Why don't we fight"

'Shush,' giggled King III. 'You am our presents. Presents don't speak.'

Leela's eyes flashed angrily. 'I am no one's present'

Kamble whimpered beside her. 'Stop aggravating them.'

The Doctor's eyes lit up as the device told him something very interesting

indeed. Of course, he'd strongly suspected it all along, but it was always

nice to be backed up by a screwdriver.

His stomach muscles were killing him, but somehow he found strength.

Seeing the security chief below, he moved his feet slightly to one side, then

let go of the bauble.

Security Officer Grey jolted with surprise as the snowy ground beside him

seemed to explode. Then he saw the bauble, which had broken in half.

Piping hot steam rose up from inside. Inside the plastic casing was what

resembled a horde of miniature satellite dishes.

'Did you really believe that these pathetic frogs had immense telekinetic

powers?' came a darkly fruity voice from above.

Grey stared up at the newcomer. The intruder.

'Enough power,' continued the man dressed as Santa Claus, 'to halt climate change? Could that really be true?'

Grey glanced around at the audience of colonists which was steadily growing. Then just stared dumbly up at the Doctor.

Leela strained at her bonds, roaring. This was not the way she wanted to die. Kamble, meanwhile, had resorted to simply screwing his eyes shut and shaking. They could smell the creatures now. The laughter was ringing in their ears.

'What's your name, down there?'

'Grey.'

'Well, Mr Grey,' said the Doctor, 'I must be fast and frank, because my companion and your civilian are about to die. You've all been duped. It's the alleged baubles on this tree which have been preventing - and will continue to prevent - you all from sinking into the ice.'

Colonists looked at each other, stunned. They began to stumble towards the Great Tree, some holding makeshift weapons. Grey looked down at the broken bauble again. At those small dishes.

'They're tempero-prima converters,' said the Doctor. 'Deflecting and partly absorbing in excess of 60 per cent of the sun's heat. They're everlasting - or as everlasting as anything can ever be. So you see, people of Colony 12, there's no need to put up with this terrible blackmail.'

'Presents,' roared the Kings, as one. 'We unwraps the presents!'

King I grabbed Leela. She headbutted it in the face, and it fell to the ground with a ghastly howl.

King II took its place, enraged - all teeth, eyes and rancid breath. 'We unwraps this one slooow!' it said, raising a claw to strike.

It flew backwards, as if tied to a suddenly yanked rope.

Leela realised that the far ends of the corridors were no longer visible. There was aggressive shouting and cursing - but most of it now came from humans. The Kings were screaming, threatening the attacking colonists with floods and all manner of mayhem.

The colonists were no longer listening.

The Kings' voices became increasingly panicked and high-pitched, and then Leela heard them no more.

Having been freed by one of Grey's men, the Doctor gingerly climbed down the tallest ladder he'd ever seen, well aware that he wasn't used to

these boots.

Someone handed him his own clothes, which he absent-mindedly slung

over one arm. Relief crossed his face: Leela was recovering on the snow,

still dazed from her ordeal. Kamble's family gathered around the man, hugging him, as tears streamed down his face.

The Doctor's brow furrowed when he saw the Kings' bodies. In death, they appeared smaller - almost foetal. Great cheers went up as the colonists tossed them one by one on to a blazing fire.

There was no need to kill them,' the Doctor told Grey. 'Robbed of

power, they would have left the planet.'

Grey couldn't quite make eye contact. 'And set up shop on another

planet, with another trick? I know we've done the right thing, and I thank

you, stranger, for showing us the light.'

The Doctor stared morosely at the makeshift funeral pyre. At the slowly

curling, charcoal-black bodies within.

'Showing humans the light? Mr Grey, I'm afraid that would take far more

than a flying visit. Come on, Leela. I feel a Scrooge attack coming on.'

In many places in Antarctica, Christmas Day is celebrated in 24-hour daylight.

Antarctica 1903

Mirth, and Walking Spirits

Gareth Wigmore

An adventure of the Second Doctor, with Jamie and Zoe

Extracts from the diary of William Cuthbertson, official artist to the Scottish

National Antarctic Expedition, overwintering at Laurie Island, South Orkney Islands.

6o°7S'S, 44°73'W

8 August 1903

We buried poor Ramsay today. It was a beautiful Antarctic day, crisp, clear

and cold. How strange and solemn it was, the stillness broken by the

sound of bagpipes - T h e Old Hundredth', 'Flowers of the Forest' - as the

30 of us placed stone after stone above his body, making a sort of cairn for

him, with a cross at its head. Dr Pirie is stricken with guilt still, thinking

he might have been able to save Ramsay if only *the* man had had the sense

to submit himself for examination earlier rather than keeping his sickness

quiet. Whether he was a martyr or a fool, what does it matter now? His

heart gave out, and has earned him eternal rest under the snow-capped

peak that now bears his name - Mount Ramsay.

But I can't say I envy him at all. To wait till Judgment Day so far from

home, and so utterly alone! His is *the* first human grave these islands have

ever seen and is likely to be the last. Above that solitary tomb, countless

petrels and gulls will teem through the polar skies for ever, and the waves

will crash at his feet, save when they are stilled into sheets of silent ice.

We buried him on the side of *the* beach closest to Scotland.

27 November 1903

Now we are but six. The ice had finally cleared enough for the Scotia to start

its voyage to Buenos Aires, leaving us behind to carry out the observations

through *the* summer. Mossman's in charge, and then there's Pirie,

Alastair Ross and William Martin, with Bill Smith as cook and handy-man.

My heart sank as we watched the ship - home - get smaller and smaller for

hours and then fade out of sight all together. We're stuck on Laurie Island

for better or worse now. Still, we expect the Scotia back in early February

- only two months by ourselves, really.

I mustn't forget that Omond House has a seventh inhabitant - Russ, the

excitable Siberian sledge-dog, is staying with us too (in fact, he's warming

my feet as I write and he sleeps); Pirie has high hopes of making him into

a good gun dog to help him retrieve penguins and the like, but the rest of

us have our doubts!

19 December 1903

Another grand summer's day by South Orkney standards. Mossman's

a hard task-master, but he gave me time off from 'ometer-reading and

cormorant-skinning to sketch a few landscapes this morning. I found

myself heading back to Ramsay's grave and setting up my easel beside it to

give the miserable soul some company. Dear God, it's a lonely place for a

grave. I don't know why but, as I sat there, morbid thoughts went through

my head - what if the Scotia never returned and the six of us slowly ran out

of food, and the will to catch more? What if years passed and we were to

grow old and ill here, and die one by one? If I were the last to go, I thought,

who would bury me, or would I be left as carrion for the great birds that

wheeled above me?

Steady, Willie - no good comes of thinking that way. There's nothing

here to harm us.

20 December 1903

Mossman has disappeared. I can't spare time to write much more. The

sunny weather is continuing, visibility is good, and the five of us fanned

out all across the bay, yet no one's caught a glimpse of him. You instantly

think the worst - fallen down a crevasse? But we'll find him yet.

21 December 1903

We said we'd meet back at the house at six o'clock tonight, after searching

all day, but Pirie never arrived. Bill's trying to keep our spirits up, but

we're all beginning to panic a little, especially Alastair. This is Mossman's

second night out there; even though it's mid-summer and warm enough

for us not to need thick clothes in the day-time, at night it's a different

matter.

22 December 1903

I can't believe I'm writing this: there are only three of us now. Alastair's

gone too, and Bill's telling the most unlikely story I ever heard about it

- says he saw the man vanish in front of his eyes, spirited away by the ghost

of Allan Ramsay. Bill's a teller of tall tales all right, and a superstitious old

salt, but the way he behaved was frightening - he really seemed to believe

what he told us. He hinted at something even more eerie too, but then

couldn't bring himself to say it.

I'm almost afraid to blow out the light and sleep. I can hear Bill

whimpering like a child in his bed - the big man, who I've never heard

complain once in the year since we left Clyde. I wish we were back there

now. With a reluctant good-night, I suppose I'd better save the candle.

23 *December* 1903

Martin and I are considering how feasible it would be for the two of us to

take the dinghy to Cape Horn or the Falklands. The answer, I fear, is not

at all. Either is the best part of 800 miles away, in the face of unfavourable

winds. The dinghy wouldn't make it; the whale-boat would need plenty of

patching up and now we both know that one of us won't be here tomorrow.

So is a forlorn hope - a brave attempt to escape our fate - better than just

bracing ourselves for the end, like the stupid seals that are too lazy to try

to escape when we stroll towards them with our knives?

I don't think I'm brave enough.

We both saw Bill Smith taken. The three of us had been skiing around

the bay, forlornly looking for some sign of the others. In quiet gloom, we

came back to the house for something warm for lunch. I opened the door,

and the room was full of people. My heart leapt in my chest - they were all

back, I thought, everything would be all right - and then I saw that there

was something wrong with them.

It was Mossman, Pirie and Alastair all right, but they were shadows ofthe

men I knew. They weren't the fit, hardy-looking souls I'd spent a year with,

but shrunken, sallow wretches, all skin and bones, their clothes hanging

loose about them. They had no tan from the polar sun, but were white as

snow-fall, and their eyes were dead. And they weren't alone, either - there

were two other figures in the room. The first was Ramsay, healthy-looking,

large as life for all that we'd buried him six months before, dressed smartly

in full naval jacket and cap, standing in the centre near the table. Next to

him was another emaciated wreck of a man I didn't recognise, sitting on

the edge of Bill's bed in the way Bill always did himself. It turned its head

to me and our eyes met. It was Bill.

It couldn't be. Bill was behind us, still out on the porch - I could hear

him stamping the snow off his boots and clearing his skis, and muttering

to himself under his breath. Yet the figure on his bed was Bill Smith too,

a nightmare image of the man. Bill as he might be if he suffered the most

appalling deprivations of hunger and illness and despair - Bill as he might

be if he had to stay on this island for ever, with no hope of rescue or relief.

It was as though the thoughts I'd had down by Ramsay's grave a few days

earlier had been given flesh and come to a skelf of life.

Martin clutched at my arm. He'd realised that it was some other Bill

at the same moment I had. The ghastly wraiths of Mossman, Pirie and

Alastair smiled at us almost in unison as our Bill crashed into the house

behind us, hearing my shout of alarm - more like a shriek, I'm ashamed to

admit. I heard him cry, 'No, no!' and I turned to him, but it was already too

late. He was disappearing - softly and suddenly vanishing, like the Baker

in the poem - clawing at the air, his mouth open in a silent scream.

In a second or two, he'd faded from our sight. Russ the dog wandered

in through the open door, sniffed the air and howled into the empty room,

for all the other figures had vanished too. Martin and I were alone. As we

are now. We're afraid to sleep. Why wouldn't we be? Every time I close my

eyes I see those dreadful figures, and Ramsay standing in the middle of

them all. I've never believed in ghosts in my life. I believe in them now.

Vivendo discimus, as it says above the door of this very house - *we* learn

through living - though I don't think I'll be here long enough to tell my tale

to anyone.

Who will be taken tomorrow, on Christmas Eve? Me or Martin? I know

he's asking himself the same question. I almost hope it's me - I don't

want

to be left here alone for another 24 hours, now I know the blow is coming.

To be here after all the others have gone, on the day our Lord was born,

knowing that a fiend is taking me to Hell.

24 December 1903

I woke up when Martin started screaming. I must have dozed off at some

point, though God knows I'd tried not to. They were all here - skeletal

Mossman, skeletal Pirie, skeletal Alastair and that terrible skeletal Bill

- sitting and lying in their hammocks as though they'd never been away.

But Ramsay sat at his table in the dress uniform we buried him in, and

sitting next to him was another ghost - Martin's.

So it's just me now. Me and Russ, who wails disconsolately, poor thing,

as though he knows that tomorrow he will be left alone to fend for himself

on this icy, barren rock.

I've no spirit to write further.

25 December 1903

Praise God, for he has saved us. He sent us the Doctor. I write this at the end

of the strangest, happiest day of my life, lying in my hammock, listening

to the drunken snores of my friends and comrades, with Christmas dinner

digesting nicely in my stomach. Pirie's back! Mossman's back! Alastair,

Bill, Martin - they're all back! The Doctor, Zoe and Jamie made me believe

that all had to be well - and it is well.

It was a warm day, even for this December which we guessed was an

unusually hot polar summer. Like everyone, I'd supposed that polar

explorers always went outside wrapped in layer after layer of furs, but I was

skiing in just my shirtsleeves and some tweed trousers, wearing a broad-

brimmed hat to protect me from the sun.

After the most frightful night of gnawing panic and terror, I had decided

that I wouldn't make it easy for Ramsay and the others to take me. I

might not have had the guts to set out in the dinghy, but I decided to take

some food and some warm clothes to wear at night and spend as long

a time away from Omond House as I could. With Russ running to keep

up alongside me, I set off on my Norwegian skis as fast as I could (I'm

quite an expert now), reckless of any sort of risk as I slipped over ice and

snow, glacier and crevasse, just putting distance between myself and the

house. I had no idea where I was going, really. I saw Ramsay's grave from

a distance - it looked the same as ever, an isolated, mossy pile of rocks

facing the sea. I headed on, thinking of the last Christmas I'd had, aboard

the Scotia at sea, eating plum-pudding in tropical heat, dishes careening

around the cabin as the ship rolled to and fro, the sound of laughter almost

deafening in my memory.

My roundabout route had taken me back closer to the house than I cared

when Russ barked at something down a hillock to my left; I turned to look

- and there they were, the three of them, playing in the snow like kiddies

in the garden on a winter morning. The girl was planting a snowball on the

back of the boy's head, while the man looked on, chuckling.

'Oh, Zoe, will you give it a rest? That's gone right down inside my shirt.'

the lad said, scrabbling at the back of his neck.

The girl and the man exchanged a glance and she fought down a giggle.

'Sorry, Jamie.'

'Aye, you will be,' said the boy she'd called Jamie - perhaps 21 or 22, a

few years younger than me - snowball cupped in hand. The girl - Zoe, even

younger - shrieked and hid for a moment behind the man, burying her

head in his jacket and then darting off to take cover behind the fourth out-

of-place object on the ice, a tall blue box. 'Police Box' was clearly written

on it, but it didn't look like any police box I'd ever seen - it had only the

four sides rather than the usual six, was much larger than they normally

are, and had a much smaller lamp. Jamie raced after Zoe, his kilt flapping

around his knees as he went one way around the box - the TARDIS, they

called it - and then the other to try to get in close to her.

It was the kilt that made me think I might be seeing things. Were these

more ghosts? Visions of home, of things I desired? A Scotsman to talk to, a

pretty girl to flirt with, a wiser and older man to tell me what I should do?

Like me, they weren't wearing any sort of polar gear. Zoe at least was

wearing a long coat, though it was tight round her body and left me

wondering where her skirts were (she wasn't wearing any - just tight,

boyish trousers!) The Doctor - for that was his name, as much as he had

a name - was dressed in a hotch-potch of clothes all smart in themselves

that somehow together made him seem careless and unkempt: check

trousers, a dark, rumpled jacket, an old shirt of mottled blue with a loosely

fastened cravat and a handkerchief spilling over from his top pocket

His extraordinary mop of black hair probably added to that beguiling,

playful air he had. I can't quite capture them with words - I'll draw them

tomorrow instead, while they're still fresh in my memory.

Jamie finally caught up to Zoe, messing his snowball right into her

hair,

sending her into cries and laughter again. The Doctor clapped politely

from the sidelines. 'Oh, well done, Jamie! That'll teach her.' Then, as Russ

wandered up to him, licking at his hand, 'Oh, hello there. Where did you

come from, eh?'

'You making friends, Doctor?' Jamie asked him.

The Doctor looked up *the* little ridge at me, while Russ nuzzled his

fingers. 'Well, I do rather hope so, Jamie,' he said, a little nervously. He

gave a little cough, almost clearing his throat, and his frowning face

changed into a tremendous grin. 'Ah, hello! I'm the Doctor, and these are

my friends. Er, Jamie, Zoe, why don't you come and meet Mr...'

'Cuthbertson,' I found myself calling back, thinking I must have gone

insane. 'Willie Cuthbertson, from the SY Scotia.'

Jamie stepped forward a little. 'Are you a Scotsman? Doctor, we never

meet Scotsmen! I'm Jamie McCrimmon, from near Drochaid Sguideil.'

I nodded, having no idea where that was (I'm not even sure I've spelt

it right), and called back, 'I'm from Leith,' at which the boy looked

disappointed.

'Och, well, you can't have everything,' he said, stepping up towards

me, his hand outstretched to shake mine. 'Where are we, then, Willie? he

asked. 'Is this one of the northern isles or somewhere like that?'

'The Scotia, the Scotia,' the Doctor was saying, biting on the fingers of

one hand. 'I know that name.'

'It's Dr Bruce's expedition -'

'Yes, yes,' he shouted, '1902 to 1904, the Scottish National Antarctic

Expedition! Yes, I know all about it.' He continued, more conspiratorially:

'Tell me, Mr Cuthbertson - would this be Laurie Island then?'

I remember putting my hands up to my head, suddenly feeling dizzy at

the impossibility of it all. 'Yes, of course. But how did -'

'Quick, Jamie,' Zoe said, as my vision began to go black, 'he looks like

he's going to -'

Call it nervous exhaustion, utter confusion, the result of days of mortal

terror, it doesn't really matter because the result was the same: I collapsed

there on the snow and woke goodness knows how long later, with Russ

panting doggy breath in my face and Zoe - up close, as pretty a girl as I've

ever seen - leaning over me with an expression of concentrated concern

I found rather touching. I felt a fair ruffian, unfit to be presented to

someone like her - wild beard and hair; I hadn't looked at myself in the

mirror for days. The Doctor and Jamie fussed around me too, gave me

a glass of water from somewhere, and then they insisted on helping me

back towards Omond House. 'I can't offer much in the way of hospitality,'

I remember saying. 'I'm all by myself you see.'

The Doctor's face fell, like a child's when a toy is taken from him.

'What? But - but I was looking forward to meeting Mr Mossman and Dr

Pirie -' He stopped himself abruptly, his eyes crinkling up in puzzlement.

I was almost taken aback by the suddenness and completeness with which

his manner had changed. 'All by yourself? Why would they leave you all by

yourself, eh?'

'Doctor, there's no point me even beginning to tell you. You simply

wouldn't believe me, it's so fantastical - macabre, even.'

Jamie clucked his tongue. 'Fantastical, you say? Macabre? I don't even

know what that one means so much, but it sounds like us all right.'

'Shush, Jamie,' Zoe told him. 'Do tell us, Mr Cuthbertson. We might be

able to help, mightn't we, Doctor?'

The Doctor had a look of absent-minded concentration like that I

saw on Pirie's face every time he stared down his microscope at a slide

teeming with tiny organisms. 'Hmm? Oh, yes, I'd like to help very much,

if I could.'

So I told them the whole ridiculous, terrifying story as the four of us and

Russ headed back towards the house. They acted as though they heard and

saw that sort of thing every day, although Jamie seemed more apprehensive

about the idea of ghosts than the other two, who took everything entirely

in their stride. They talked to each other about it, faster than I could keep

up, with a lot of words that I didn't really understand.

There's no such thing as ghosts,' Zoe said, shrugging. By this time we

were back in Omond House, sipping mugs of tea and sitting around the

table. I'd even broken out a box of our precious biscuits for them. The

body dies and that's the end of things.'

'Och, you've got no heart sometimes,' Jamie complained. 'She's got no

- what's the word, Doctor?'

'What?'

'You know...'

'Oh, you mean romance, Jamie.'

'Aye - romance. There's all lands of strangeness in the world.'

The Doctor had been tapping his lips and chin with his forefinger,

his focus outwith the conversation, somewhere in the middle distance.

'He's right, Zoe - you mustn't be too hasty. There may not be souls in

torment walking the earth, clanking their chains and wailing about leaving

the living too soon, but there can be psychic resonances, afterimages,

aftershocks - echoes, if you like. Some places and some times are just

better for hearing those echoes than others.'

She was unimpressed. 'What would any spook be doing all the way out

here, in the middle of nowhere? Waiting around, trying to scare this man

out of his wits? I don't believe it, Doctor. It's not rational.'

The Doctor's eyes flicked back into the room, as if he'd suddenly put two

and two together. 'Well, that poor engineer, Mr Ramsay. He was the first

man to die on this island, the first truly sentient creature whose existence

has ended within hundreds of miles of here.'

The girl wasn't finished protesting. 'What's that got to do with

anything?'

'Well, it might have everything to do with id' The Doctor sounded

flustered. 'Maybe he was lonely.'

Jamie must have seen the way I was regarding the conversation; he

leaned over and casually said, 'Don't worry, Willie - half the time I don't

have a clue what they're talking about either. D'you have any more of those

biscuits?' Then he asked me about the Lion Rampant flag he'd seen flying

from the roof of the house and how large the Scottish Empire was.

After a few minutes of arguing with Zoe, drinking his tea and wandering

around the room, inspecting the meteorological table and its instruments,

the Doctor put down his mug, spread his arms wide and said, quietly, with

a little smile, 'The problem with all this is that i f s wrong, you see.'

'What d'you mean, wrong?' Jamie asked, before I could.

'Now, Mr Cuthbertson - may I call you Willie? You have to understand,

Willie,' (and he said all this entirely seriously, so that I half-believed it from

the start) 'that I know a lot about time and about history, and about what

you would call the future. You see, Jamie, Zoe and I don't live in 1903. We

flit about all through time. Zoe's from more than a hundred years into

your future. Jamie's from more than a hundred years into your past. And

I'm - well, let's just say I have an overview of the whole thing. That I can

fit it all together.'

'It's true, Willie,' Zoe said, eyes beseechingly wide.

Jamie added a matter-of-fact 'Aye,' with a nod.

'And what I can tell you is this,' the Doctor continued, utterly convincingly,

as though reciting words from a book. 'The Scotia returns to Laurie Island

in late February to find you and all the others perfectly well. You all return

home without incident or accident'

I must have laughed, or cried out. 'But I've seen men disappear right

in front of me, Doctor - taken away by some devil! You can't tell me that

didn't happen, because it has! Those men are gone!'

The Doctor's face took on a long and grave aspect. 'It doesn't matter

what has happened. They will come back. They have to. Let's take a

walk,

Willie, shall we? You two, would you mind staying here?'

'Here with the ghosts, Doctor?' Jamie almost yelped.

'Oh, there aren't any ghosts, Jamie,' Zoe snapped back at him.

The Doctor and I walked out of the house and into the snow, following

our own footsteps back towards the blue box they were playing around

when I first saw them. 'Truth be told, Willie, your little expedition is

soon forgotten about, even in Scotland. It's partly because it's Scottish

- you know what snobs the London establishment are - but it's really for

the simple reason that it isn't a disaster. Other polar explorers around

this time get horribly lost and terrible things happen to them, and their

sacrifice catches the public imagination like wildfire. Zoe's from your

future, and she doesn't know the names of Bruce and the Scotia the way

she knows names like Shackleton, Scott and the Endurance. But none of

that matters. What really matters is that, a thousand years from now, the

whole Earth will be in terrible clanger from a new ice age. And a scientist in

a library somewhere will come across results of some of the experiments

you've set in train here in 1903, and that'll get them thinking. Names

like Mossman and Pirie - not yours, I'm afraid - will suddenly be more

important and more valuable than you could imagine, and the whole

world will remember the Scotia.'

My mind was reeling. I couldn't really comprehend what he was saying,

but I knew I wanted to believe it Then he opened the doors of his police box

and showed me inside. We stood inside that vast, white, futuristic palace

with its strange walls and great hexagonal machine, and that amazing

little man smiled kindly at me. 'I know they can't possibly all be scratched

out from history by an angry ghost, because history simply says otherwise.

And if history on this were to go wrong, it would go very wrong.'

And then he proved to me that what he had said was true.

I walked on air all the way back to Omond House, feeling ten feet tall.

When we got there, Jamie was driving Zoe to distraction by playing on

Bill Smith's set of bagpipes. 'Oh, what a racket!' the Doctor complained,

putting a finger in each of his ears, 'At least play something appropriate,

can't you?'

'What d'you mean?'

'Well, it is Christmas Day, after all.'

'Och, is it? Why didn't you say so before?'

The Doctor turned to me, his dark eyes glittering as though some idea

had just occurred to him. 'Are you a religious man, Willie?'

'Aye,' I told him, 'Church of Scotland, man and boy.'

'Hmm. Then maybe a carol is just what we need. No, no,' he said,

shifting his attention to Jamie and waving for him to stop; the lad had

started playing 'I Saw Three Ships'. 'No, I've never really liked that one,

Jamie.' He tried what I think was 'The Coventry Carol', but Zoe shook her

head. 'So miserable, Jamie. Play something upbeat if you have to play at

all.'

I didn't recognise what he started playing next at first, but I quickly got

it - 'The Boar's Head Carol', a grand old tune, which I hadn't heard for

years - and started to sing along. It suited the pipes well, with the drone

underneath, and the Doctor seemed to know all the words, clapping his

hands in rhythm.

'The boar's head in hand bring I, bedeck'd with bay and rosemary...'

'I don't know it!' said Zoe.

'Really? You'll pick it up! Come on, Willie, it's Christmas!' He gestured

at Jamie and the two of them launched into the chorus. The words were

coming back to me by this time, and I joined in too. We just sort of fell

into it naturally, with Jamie blasting it out and marching in a little square

around the table, and I began to follow. Soon enough, the Doctor was

up on his feet too, joining the column a little haltingly, but clapping and

singing away. Zoe obviously didn't want to be left out, and joined in too,

singing the tune if not the words.

It was a simple enough daft, impromptu entertainment of the sort that

we'd had a hundred times in the cabin of the Scotia or here in Omond

House. Maybe it was Jamie's playing - a mile better than Bill's - or the

Doctor's infectious enthusiasm, or Zoe's soprano where I was used to a

gruff bass, but it made me stupidly happy. Here I was, Willie Cuthbertson

from Leith, singing and dancing away on a Christmas Day as far from

home as I'd ever thought I could be - yet here were three travellers in

time, who'd shown me my own future! All those who'd scoffed at the

expedition, and who'd sneer at it when we got back - they didn't know

what I knew: that in a thousand years, what we were doing would help to

save every soul on the planet! Is it any wonder I sang loud too, clapped, fair

danced a jig, grabbed Zoe by the hands and whirled her round, whooping

in delight? 'I pray you, my masters, merry be,' we sang - and so we were.

In that moment, I had the greatest Christmas present man has had since

that first Christmas long ago - knowledge of my place in the scheme of

things, and my purpose. I believed with every ounce of my being what the

Doctor had told me - that everything would be all right; that I would see

my friends again; that I would see Scotland again.

We stopped for a minute while the Doctor and I dredged up the words of

a second verse from memory and taught Zoe the chorus, and while Jamie,

who said he was out of practice, got his breath back. Back we went into

the song and dance again, the four of us, with Russ getting amidst our

feet, not wanting to be left out. T h e boar's head, as I understand, is the

rarest dish in all the land...' Then I noticed that there weren't four of us,

but five. Martin, who I'd seen fade out ofthe world the previous day, was

suddenly simply there between me and Zoe. It was the ghastly, desiccated

version of himself; he seemed barely able to stand, and his voice was a

hoarse whisper. But what it said was: 'Our steward has provided this, in

honour of the King of Bliss...' And it seemed to me as though he grew

stronger and surer and stouter and heartier with every word. His sunken

cheeks began to puff out; his sagging clothes became filled with muscle

and fat; his eyes grew lively and animated - and there he was, transformed

in a moment into the strong, fit man I knew, suddenly one of us, joining

in the song and the dance.

'Don't stop, Jamie! Keep playing!' the Doctor called, patting his amazed

friend on the shoulder frantically.

Then Bill Smith was there, then Alastair, then Pirie and Mossman, all of

them going from the walking dead to their rugged old selves in the time it

took to dance four times round the table. They clapped their arms round

each other, round me, round the Doctor and Zoe and Jamie as though they

were old friends. But we didn't stop singing for some time, not wanting

to break the spell. We didn't even stop when Allan Ramsay appeared at

the side of the room, tall in his best uniform, his skin whiter than the ice

outside. That sad ghost - he moved towards us as though to join the dance,

but stopped himself and just went and sat on one of the beds, taking off

his cap and messing with his hair the way I had seen him do many a time

aboard the Scotia when he was agitated. He sat for a few minutes with

his head down, not looking at us as we sang. Then, with a deep breath,

he stood up as straight as a poker, thrust his cap back on his head, and

walked past us all, not pausing to open the door before he went straight

through it.

Where he went, I don't know. Back to his grave along the beach? Out

into the freezing air of Laurie Island for ever? Wherever, I don't think we'll

see him again. What he'd tried to do had failed - life had triumphed over

death, on Christmas Day.

I don't know about the Doctor either. Could he have guessed that our

song and dance, our simple celebration of life, would bring them all back

from whatever netherworld the shade of that wretched man had dragged

them to? None of them could remember a thing about where they had

been. Had the Doctor planned it? I will never know, I suppose.

But I do know what we ate for Christmas dinner - what our steward, Bill,

provided us in honour of the King of Bliss: tomato soup, roast pheasant,

penguin a la Scotia with potatoes and Brussels sprouts, and a spectacular

plum-duff, with preserved fruit, coffee and cigars to follow. The three

travellers shared our food and joined our celebrations, and now they're

gone.

Mossman thinks we shouldn't mention any of this to the others when

we get back on the Scotia. He thinks - and of course he's right - that the

official history of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition won't be

helped if people confuse it with the plot of the latest HG Wells novel. But

to see such things, and not to be able to tell them! To meet such people,

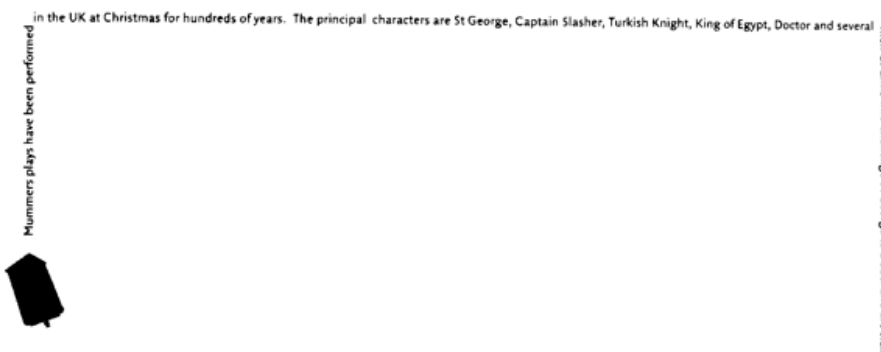
and to have to keep it to yourself for ever! To know one's own destiny!

I shan't sleep again tonight. How could P When the first ever Christmas

to be celebrated on this tiny speck of polar rock turns into its first ever

Boxing Day, I'll still be awake, grinning from ear to ear and thinking of

the Doctor.


Mummers plays have been performed in the UK at Christmas for hundreds of years. The principal characters are St George, Captain Slasher, Turkish Knight, King of Egypt, Doctor and several men-at-arms who challenge St George to a duel and are slain.

United Kingdom **1982**

Do You Smell Carrots?

Simon Guerrier

An adventure of the First Doctor and the Fifth Doctor, with Steven Taylor

'It's no good!' the Doctor called over the noise of the snowstorm and rotorblades. 'Steven, you must try to get us closer!'

Steven Taylor didn't reply, his teeth clamped tightly together as he fought with the primitive controls. He had never flown a helicopter before, but it worked like a hopper he'd shared with some other new pilots just after they'd passed their exams. A long time ago, a long time in the future.

Just as in the Venusian stratosphere, so in a snowstorm on Earth. The rotorblades whipped the snow round and round, so that looking out through the windshield you felt you were spinning. Even being conscious of the illusion, you'd instinctively push the flight stick to compensate. At the same time, the snow could tilt the horizon - throwing off your sense of direction. So you just had to grit your teeth, ignore your flailing senses, and trust what your read-outs and displays were telling you. Elementary pilot stuff he'd been taught back in his teens.

He scanned the white-flecked sky for landmarks that he could rely on. The snow obscured the contours of any visual reference, so Steven couldn't be sure how near or far he was to anything - even to the ground.

He might just as well have had his eyes shut.

But he persevered. He pressed the helicopter forward, the blades

crunching into the storm. Good job the thing was noisy; filling his head

with roar and vibration, squeezing out all thought of just how crazy this

was. Flying a helicopter through a snowstorm. Above a populated area.

In pursuit of a giant mosquito. And with the Doctor hanging precariously

from the back door, yanking the whole primitive vehicle off balance.

'Try again, Doctor,' Steven called back, glancing over his shoulder. The

old man was leaning right out of the aircraft, silvery hair and the tails of

his frock coat flapping behind him. He had his feet on the landing bar,

one hand tight round the edge of the door, the other flung out into the

night. And in that hand was a nozzle, attached by a rubber hose to a large

container of washing-up liquid.

Steven couldn't help grinning. The Doctor might be several hundred

years old, but give him a challenge and he was reckless as any schoolboy.

The Doctor pulled the trigger on the nozzle and, slushing and honking

like someone blowing their nose, the device sprayed washing-up liquid

out into the night. And from somewhere out there, louder even than the

rotorblades, came a monstrous roar.

'I should say we've got its attention!' called the Doctor, seeming pleased

with himself.

'Watch out!' cried Steven as huge, glittering bug eyes loomed at them

from within the gale.

And then the thing was on them, all spindly legs and wings, a great

proboscis like an elephant's trunk bashing against the glass of the

windscreen, eager to suck out their brains.

Steven yanked the control stick left, trying to shake the creature off. He

heard the Doctor cry out from behind him, but couldn't look back to see if

the old man was still clinging on. All Steven could see was the mad, savage

creature, its legs twisted tight around the front of the helicopter.

The mosquito had grown to enormous proportions, swollen and

dripping and angry. It was at least as big as the helicopter now, and

was probably thinking of Steven and the Doctor as soft, delicious fruit,

hidden behind a hard but delicate shell. Long, spindly limbs grappled the

helicopter, trying to prize their way inside but keeping well clear of the

thudding rotorblades. The weight of the mosquito lurched the controls

from Steven's hands. Suddenly the helicopter was just a dead weight in

space, tumbling out of the sky.

The Doctor - still there, thank heavens! - sloshed and honked more of

the washing-up liquid at the mosquito. Steven saw fine bubbles

burning

into the creature's huge and leathery back. The creature cried out again,

an extraordinary, awful roar of unnatural savagery. Its long, hairy feet

untangled from their moorings, and Steven felt the helicopter back under

his command. He steered right, and up, trying to get them out of the way

of the mosquito...

Which exploded in a mess of wet and yellow gunk.

By the time Alex and Jonathan had got into their coats, gloves and wellies,

the helicopter had vanished from the sky. They stood in the snow that

covered their back garden, scanning the sky for dark shapes. The thing

had been right over their house, all noise and excitement and whirring

blades, but now...

Mum sighed and said they must have missed it, and Alex felt a sudden

rage. Nothing exciting ever happened in Reading and he had badly wanted

to see the helicopter that was making all the noise. He wanted to shout at

her that it was all her fault. If she hadn't made him wait until Jonathan was

ready, he would have been in time to see it.

But he knew shouting only got him sent indoors. And he had to be good

if he wanted Father Christmas to visit, like Mum kept on saying. Anyway,

he knew a good way to deal with her when she got annoying.

He closed his mittened fingers round the catch of the zip on his coat,

zipping it all the way up and out, so that he looked out through the fur-

lined tunnel of the hood. It felt snug and cosy with the hood up, his own

breath warming his cheeks and nose. Dad called it a snorkel, or said he

looked like an Eskimo, and Alex couldn't tell if the joke was nice or nasty.

You never knew with Dad.

But the hood annoyed Mum because she couldn't see him, and he could

pretend that he didn't always hear her. She said it was like he was one of

those little things in Star Wars. She never learnt their names, no matter

how many times you told her. And anyway, being a Jawa was skill.

'Why don't you come and help us, Alex?' said Mum. She and Jonathan

were now down on their knees, rolling a ball of snow around the garden.

'We're going to build a snowman.'

Alex hurried over, though it isn't easy to run when your Wellingtons are

a size too big. And then he stopped. Something about the snow in their

garden had grabbed his attention. Even with the sky overcast and grey, it

glared bright in his eyes. There was something yellowy and gunky about

it. And it drew him inextricably towards it...

He crumped a handful of snow together and began rolling it forward,

just like Mum was doing. There was a weird, fizzy sensation in his

fingertips that wasn't just the cold. It was more tingly than that, and he

could feel it through his mittens. Ignoring it, he concentrated on making

his snowball bigger.

'Okay,' Mum said. 'You do the head and Jonathan can make the body.'

'Yeah,' said Jonathan. 'Body.'

'I'm making my own snowman,' Alex said. He looked at the snow in Mr

Davy's garden next door. It was clear and white like normal.

'All right,' said Mum. 'You make your own snowman. I'll help Jonathan

with his.'

So they worked, Alex in studious silence, Mum gabbling away to

Jonathan in her sing-song, baby voice. Alex knew Jonathan didn't like her

doing it. He was old enough to learn counting and the time, so he couldn't

be a baby any more. But you couldn't tell that stuff to Mum.

Alex's ball of snow was quickly the size of a football - he wanted to make

sure his snowman was bigger than Jonathan's - but he found he couldn't

just roll it along. He had to twist it and turn it as it rolled so that it kept

its nice round shape. He stopped to get his breath and looked back at

the

mad pattern that he'd made behind him, a long, twisty trail of exposed,

bare grass. But the snow fell thick and quickly, fast covering the path. He

sighed, and his breath steamed out of the funnel of his hood like some

kind of monster. He h u f f e d and puffed, trying out different combinations

of monstrous steam.

'You need a head now,' his Mum suggested. 'You need to roll another

ball.'

But he hadn't finished with his snowman's body. It was higher than

his knees, so he had to get his hands low under it to make it move at all.

It would tumble forward, out of his control, and he had to chase after it,

almost like it had a mind of its own. At last it was up to his waist, a great

fat body slightly squished in the middle, like one of those marshmallow

sweets his Gran sometimes bought him. A big body, a proper body, much

better than Jonathan and Mum's.

Then he began again, scrunching up a handful of snow into a snowball,

then rolling it this way and that so it ate up more snow, getting steadily

bigger and bigger. He looked up to see Jonathan and Mum had already

finished with their snowman. Even though Mum had the kind of gloves

with separate fingers, theirs was a crude, wonky thing that looked more

like a stalactite than a man. No, a stalagmite. Tights hang *down from* the

ceiling, he remembered, having learned the difference at school.

They had pressed spindly bits of tree branch into the snowman's

shoulders, giving him weedy, skinny arms, with long and eerie fingers.

And now Mum had got Jonathan scrabbling through the flower beds,

looking for stones for the snowman's eyes.

Alex got on with his own work. When his snowball was big enough, he

rolled it precariously over to his snowman's body. Even squatting round

the ball, using all his muscles, he couldn't lift it from the ground. Alex

wouldn't dream of asking Mum or Jonathan for help. Instead, he rolled the

ball up to the snowman's body, and then tried rolling it against the body,

so that it rolled upwards. It worked! It was like the snowman was helping

him get the head onto the shoulders. Strange, electric tingles chased up

and down his spine as he pressed harder, rolled the ball further upwards,

got his hands right underneath it, and then a knee, and then his thigh.

And then the snowball just sort of twisted into place on top of the body,

so snug he didn't even have to hold it or cement it in place. Alex stood

back, amazed he had managed to achieve this on his own; his snowman

looking real now it had a head. Really real. As if at any moment it could

just... *move*.

'Mum, look!' said Jonathan, running over to admire Alex's work. He

kept his distance, not daring to touch the snowman - knowing better than

to touch anything that belonged to Alex, at least when Alex was watching.

Then Jonathan grinned as an idea struck him, and he offered Alex the

stones in his hands. The brothers worked together to give the snowman

eyes, and a line of pebbly buttons down his front.

'That's very impressive, darling,' said Mum, coming over. 'Your Dad will

love this when he gets home. And you know what would really help?' She

reached into a pocket and produced two carrots.

Alex found it difficult to hold the carrot with his mittens on, so he bit the

end of one mitten and wiggled his hand out of it, letting the glove dangle

from the elastic up his sleeve. The air was biting cold against his skin,

so he worked quickly. He pressed the carrot into the space between the

snowman's beady eyes, twisting it so that it dug into the snowy flesh. And

then, with one finger, he drew a crooked smile under the carroty nose.

He shivered. The snow felt... strange... electric. Like licking a battery.

It didn't feel like snow; it had a sticky texture like syrup. He withdrew his

finger and looked at it closely in case it was gunky. His hand was pink and

raw with cold, but his fingertip steamed slightly with warm power.

'Mum, look,' he said, showing her his steaming finger.

'Oh yes,' she said. 'That's odd, isn't it? I think it's just the cold.'

Jonathan was gazing at the steaming finger in amazement. Then he

tore off his gloves and pressed his tiny hands against his own lopsided

snowman. He giggled at the cold sensation of the snow. Alex wondered

if he too felt the prickle of electric. But he didn't say anything because he

knew what Mum would say.

You couldn't tell that kind of stuff to Mum.

They went indoors to wash their hands while Mum made egg and

soldiers. And as he scrubbed at his fingernails to get the gunky snow off

them, Alex wondered if the electric meant his snowman was alive. And if

they'd get ET biscuits for afters.

By the time it got dark, the snowmen were beginning to feel something of

the world around them. Their stone eyes could not see, their carroty noses

could not sniff, they had nothing like brains or consciousness inside

their

heads of rolled, compacted snow.

And yet the larger snowman was aware of the bracing air that cut around

his snowy skin. He could feel the soft touch of snowflakes falling all

around him. And he could sense his younger brother - a smaller, frailer

version of h i m s e l f - somewhere close but out of reach.

Slowly, the yellow alien gunk that had got mixed up with the snow

reached deep into the snowman. It oiled around the elegant crystals of

each single piece of snow, linking them, connecting them, sharing with

them one idea. An idea it had taken, copied, from the small boy who had

touched it with his living finger. A boy who was the pattern, the idea, for

the snowman now awake.

Carefully the snowman turned his head. The snow that made up his

shoulders creaked and protested, but the oily gunk round each snowflake

kept them all together, kept them working as one. The snowman wanted

to see his little brother. His two cold, dead stones gazed balefully down,

the oily gunk simulating rods and cones like the ones in the small boy's

eyes, until the snowman saw his little brother. And his little brother turned

to look back up at him.

The snowman had no legs but he felt the need to move. The gunk inside

him, driving him, had not yet managed articulate thought, but it had a

simple, insistent urge to not be in the same place. Something not quite as

fully formed as a sense of danger or urgency. More a feeling that his poor

little brother needed to be somewhere safe.

The gunk inside his body responded to this need, changing the shape of

the compacted snow, a long, languid ripple sweeping vertically round the

surface. It did not create legs but copied the effect and feel of walking, the

undulating, snowy skin walking the snowman gently forward. More slug

than man, he took his first tentative step onto freshly fallen, virgin snow.

Yellow gunk in the underside of the snowman reached out to this new

material, absorbed it into the whole. Another step forward, and now he

had left a dark trail behind him, a thick wedge of exposed grass.

The snowman had no arms to beckon with, but he turned to his brother

and shrugged his shoulders, a gesture that said 'Follow'. He watched his

brother's body ripple warily, then take its own first step forward.

With each step their strange gliding, shambling walk got better,

smoother, took less effort. They made their way round to the edge of the

garden, and then down the path that ran by the side of the house. The

snow was thinner here, in the shade of the building, and the snowman

leading his little brother felt the hard, cold texture of cement.

At the end of the path stood a tall wooden fence, blocking off their

escape. Stone eyes traced the outline of a door in the fence, much taller

than both the snowmen. Yet the door was closed and did not open under

pressure. Forcing it would make noise and draw attention; the snowman

had begun to think real thoughts.

He glided back to let his brother explore the fence with the long, spindly

fingers he didn't have himself. There seemed to be a simple catch keeping

the door from opening, but the little brother was unused to such a tricky

operation, and his fingers struggled to get the right purchase. Watching

his brother try again and again, the snowman felt a new sensation. A

gnawing feeling ate away at the centre of its body. He was feeling fear.

And then the catch on the door snapped back and the door creaked open.

The little brother turned to the snowman and gazed up at him blankly. The

snowman nodded and led him through the open door.

The house was at the top of a hill. Snow swirled in the air, falling on

pavements, parked cars and the wide carriageway of road. A sign on

the far side said 'Kendrick Road', in letters and language the snowman understood, having copied his understanding from the boy.

In the same way he understood that the town was down the hill, alive with shops and people. That would be the best place to hide, disappearing in amongst *the* crowd. The snowman led his brother down *the* snow-covered pavement. His brother reached out a spindly arm and pressed it to the snowman's side; the nearest they could come to holding hands.

Then there was a car coming, slow on the snowy road. Huge and powerful lights swept up and over the two snowmen. They froze, stood perfectly, deathly still. And the car didn't even see them.

They moved on again, *the* snowman looking around at the houses as they passed them. Each house was built in a different style. He liked how each one seemed to express its own idea, bold and individual, yet each one was also part of the same street. The alien gunk inside him struggled to find a lost memory; of a place where there wasn't any difference. Where you broke anything that was not the same. And the snowman realised then, with his fast-developing mind, that he did not know what he was, or what he had been. He felt a pang for that loss, and again that sense of clanger. A prickling of sensation, an awareness of somebody near them. The snowman looked round, and there by the kerb lay a black

and

damaged creature. He led his little brother over to investigate, and they

both peered down at the broken body of a cat

The cat had been hit by a car and then used the last of its dwindling

energy to get to the edge of the road. It hadn't even had the resources to

climb up on to the pavement. The snowmen gazed at it with their stone

eyes. There was nothing they could do.

And then the little brother reached out one spindly arm and stroked the

cat's bloody fur. The snowman didn't have arms to stop him but knew in

the jumble of his memories that the little boy's Mum would not approve.

The cat shivered, tried weakly to respond.

The snowman's little brother stroked it gently once again, and released

some of his yellowy gunk, drooling from the end of his skinny, twiggy

fingers onto the cat's gaping wound.

With a hiss and sizzle, the wound repaired itself. The cat sat up, licking

at the bloody, healed area. Then it looked up at the two snowmen who'd

just saved its life, and ran off into the night

The two snowmen watched it go. The snowman could feel what his little

brother had given up to bring the cat back to life. He was frailer now, and

finding it harder to keep his snowflakes together. So the snowman would

lead him, look after him, until they found somewhere safe.

Another, bigger avenue cut across the bottom of Kendrick Road. The

snowman and his brother stopped near the kerb, not on it. They looked

and listened, like the Green Cross Man said, in the memories the snowman

had copied. It was late now, and there were few cars on the road, so soon

they were on the other side.

They passed down East Street, all tall and uniform terraces in the same

white and grubby stone. The snow was slushier here, and the snowman

felt something coarse and biting underfoot. Something that ate at the

snow he was made of, attacked the oily gunk holding him together. It took

a moment to analyse and understand that the pavement had been gritted

with salt, to keep the snow at bay. The snowman and his brother pressed

on, as if over broken glass.

On their left a narrow alley cut through the terrace, and from it came

the deep throb of a bass line. Was this yet more danger? The snowman

scoured its copied memories for the word 'pub', and adjusted the sensitive

parts of his skin so that they could hear and identify the sounds.

People cheered as Renee and Renato reached the end of 'Save Your

Love',

and on came 'Come On Eileen'. There was warmth and light at the end of

the alley, a warmth both snowmen were drawn to. But as they neared the

alley they also felt the heat's affect on their bodies. The snow sweated water

that the oily gunk couldn't hold on to. They stepped back abruptly, chilled

by what they'd felt, the danger they'd been in. And then the snowman

realised with horror that they would always be out in the cold.

And then there were people emerging from the dark corridor, a young

man and woman arm in arm. She had spiked hair and he wore a red Father

Christmas hat with a white pom-pom on the end. Both were breathless

from dancing and the evening's excitement

The girl laughed when she saw the snowman and his brother, frozen

and still on the pavement.

'It's like they're going for a walk,' she said, and the snowman watched

how it was she spoke. Her middle contracted to squeeze air out through

the hole in her face - her mouth - and the mouthparts moved to shape the

exhalation into distinct, intelligible sounds.

The gunk flowed around the snowman's head, copying, altering.

'You think they look cold?' asked the man, his stomach contracting in

the same way. He was trying to be funny, trying to impress the girl. He

plucked off his hat and placed it squarely on the snowman's head.

So the snowman turned to him and tried to squeeze air through the

crude smile on his own face. He knew what he should say.

'Thaaaaa,' he began.

The man screamed, turned and fled, back the way the snowman and his

brother had just come. The girl hurried after him, though not as fast or

efficiently because of her glittering shoes. The snowman's little brother

made to follow after them, as if this were all a game. He stopped and

looked back at the snowman, who sadly shook his head, still wearing the

Father Christmas hat. The snowman and his brother made their way in the

opposite direction.

They had to wait a while on one side of Queens Road for a lull in the

steady flow of traffic. Passengers snug inside the passing cars would

sometimes wave at the two snowmen, and laugh or gape when the smaller

snowman waved back with one spindly arm.

There was even less snow on the pavements now, the amount of grit

underfoot much higher. Each step cost the snowmen that much more.

As they passed over a small, humpback bridge they heard thick water

churning beneath them. It felt like the sound of themselves as they

gradually dissolved. The snowman knew they were running out of time.

They passed the bus depot, and could smell the tang of the nearby

brewery, flavouring the night air with something a bit like cornflakes.

At the top of the street they admired the statue of Queen Victoria. The

snowman's borrowed memories told him that they were on the corner

of Friar Street. Further up, beyond the Post Office, the street boasted

two different cinemas. This was where they were heading; the place the

boy whose memories he possessed thought of as magical and safe. The

snowman was drawn to find them, to feel the same cosy anticipation as the

lights went down. But the warmth coming from the foyers stopped him in

his tracks. These were places the two snowmen did not belong.

Instead they turned round, following the narrow, flint-walled street

that led to the ruins of the abbey. The road was thick with snow, soft and

delicious under their sore, salted feet. They passed through a gate and into

the other place where the boy always felt safe, the open space of Forbury

Gardens.

The snow was untouched here, and the snowman's little brother

ran forward into the drift that covered the manicured lawns. He rolled

himself over and over, leaving behind him a wake of exposed, dark grass.

The snowman joined him and they tumbled over and over together,

replenishing themselves, hissing and sighing where they'd not learnt how

to laugh. There was more than enough snow for both of them.

But it wouldn't last.

The snowman could feel the change in the air as morning crept towards

them. Away over the ruins of the abbey, the far edge of the sky showed

the first brightening of dawn. He knew what was going to happen. The

sun would slowly rise up, hour by hour, and warm the town around them,

melting the snow to slush and then to water. He and his brother would

trickle away.

Even if the snowman had been able to speak properly, he couldn't have

told this to his little brother, still playing indulgently around the gardens.

The snowman sat back on the cold grass, gazing up at the dark, looming

statue of a lion - the one the boy was still so in awe of - and the infinity of

stars far behind him. He felt small and fragile in this strange, huge world.

His time was soon going to be over, but he felt glad he had been able to

experience this night, this chance to explore. The snowman watched his

little brother gambolling in the snow, and felt at peace. He lay back and

gazed up at the stars.

'Beautiful, aren't they?' said a man, standing beside the snowman.

The snowman stayed frozen, perfectly still, knowing better than to

respond.

They're even better without the streetlights, of course,' said the man.

'You can see thousands more. Would you like to?'

The snowman resisted the urge to stand up. But surely the man was

talking to him? He moved his head ever so slightly, just to be able to see

him. A tall man in pale clothes, vivid red lines at the edges of his coat.

When he spoke, his breath didn't steam from his mouth. He didn't seem

to feel the cold at all.

'I'm the Doctor,' said the man, looking right at the snowman. 'I think we

sort of met before. I was older then. And in a helicopter. No?'

The snowman shook his head.

'Well, never mind,' said the Doctor. 'Probably for the best You weren't

quite so amiable last time. I think you must have adopted a new template

for your behaviour. Probably a survival instinct, a way of fitting in more

invisibly. But you still give off the same radiation signature you know.

That's how I found you.'

The snowman nodded, though he didn't know what the man meant

Instead he glanced round to see his little brother coming warily towards

them.

'Hello,' said the Doctor, kindly. 'Looked like you were having fun.'

The snowman's little brother nodded slowly.

'Well,' said the Doctor. 'I know a place that's got lots more snow. As

much as you could ever want. But if I'm going to take you there, I need you

to promise me something.'

The snowman squeezed his body inwards, forcing air out through his

wonky smile. And with great deliberation, he shaped the breath to form

the word 'Whhaaat?'

The Doctor smiled. 'Don't frighten the penguins.'

Christian homes in Bethlehem are marked by a cross painted over the door. People watch the procession to the Church of the Nativity which accompanies a man carrying a cross and riding a black horse.

Israel 1BC

The Doctor's Cross Word

J J Seeker

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor

It was as dark as the nanosecond before the Big Bang when the Universe

exploded outwards from an inconceivably compact point of matter and

time began.

It was as silent as the nanosecond after the Small Whimper when the

Universe, having flowed and ebbed like a titanic tide, imploded back into

its original compressed matrix and time ceased.

The Doctor was roughly 13 billion years ahead of the former and 29

billion years behind the latter; but he could never remember being so

disorientated. He had taken a single step outside the TARDIS into the

silent darkness ofa space vacuole and now he did not know where he was,

where the TARDIS was, or why he was here. The only thing he was sure

of was the one thing he was always sure of: who he was. Although, in this

vacuum of sensory deprivation, he was losing touch with exactly which of

his regenerations he was currently occupying.

The Doctor was leaning nonchalantly on the u;all of a stable in Bethlehem an hour

before the midnight of New Year's Eve, 1BC, contemplating the vagaries of time. Not

of Time itself but of the fallibility of the terrestrial race in its measurement.

For instance: the year was about to change from 1 BC to AD 1 without a Year

Zero in between - although no-one living at the time knew it. And the reason for

this mathematical abomination was that the potentates in the Church who were

responsible for creating the annual calendar had not caught up with the Arabian

concept of nought. And why did January 1st fall when it did? When Julius Caesar

reformed the calendar to standardise the number of days in a year - which used to

change radically from one year to the next - he decided to start the new year logically on the shortest day. There was an outcry by priests and people. The year always

started with a new moon. So January 1st marks the first new moon after the shortest

day in 46 BC.

The Doctor sighed. Accurate measurements trumped by irrelevant data!

He had no idea how long he had been in the dark when a word appeared

in pure white in front ofhis eyes.

WHO it read, then two more words and a question mark.

ARE YOU? The letters slowly faded into the black.

'I am the Doctor,' he replied, but his words did not break the silence. It

was like trying to speak in outer space.

'I am the Doctor,' he shouted, but the silence was still louder. 'Now look,'

he thought. 'I know who I am. I know when I am. Tell me where I am.'

YOU ARE HERE, spelled the lights.

The Doctor waited for an indicatory arrow to appear, but none came.

A NAME IS NOT NEEDED. YOU WILL NEVER GO ANYWHERE ELSE.

'Oh, really. What do you want from me?'

EVERYTHING.

'Everything?'

I ASKED WHO YOU ARE. I MEANT NOT WHO YOU ARE TO YOU. I

MEANT WHO YOU ARE TO ME.

'I am nothing to you.'

NOT YET. I CAN READ THE EDGES OF YOUR MIND. SOON I

WILL BE ABLE TO READ IT ALL AND EXTRACT WHAT I NEED. YOU

WILL BECOME AS NOTHING. IT WILL BE AS THOUGH YOU NEVER

EXISTED.

The Doctor paused in his temporal musings to watch an interesting figure coming

erratically down the otherwise empty street. He was of aristocratic Mongolian blood,

clad in rich garments of black and white with an unusual coronet upon his head.

He was veering down the street peering into outhouses with what appeared to be a

mounting frustration. On seeing the Doctor he hurried over and addressed him.

'A thousand, thousand pardons for disturbing you, but perchance you are the spark

to illumine my night. Have you seen a stable hereby which distinguishes itself by its

popularity - especially, apparently, amongst farmhands and choirs of some

sort?'

This is the place, but your timing is a bit off,'said the Doctor, amused. 'Now, let

me guess who you are. Caspar, Melchior or... I always forget the third one.'

'Balthazar,' said the man bitterly.

'That's the fellow! Is that you?'

'My name is Nayigeren.'

'But that's amazing,' shouted the Doctor in delight. 'I always thought you were

mythical. You're the Lost Wise Man - the Fourth ofthe Magi!'

'You may read my mind, but you obviously don't know me. Your offer is not

exactly irresistible. Do you really believe I will cooperate with you?'

COOPERATION IS IRRELEVANT. PARTICIPATION IS ALL THAT IS

REQUIRED.

'A perfect host! Do you get many visitors?'

NOT MANY. BUT IN ORDER TO GET HERE YOU MUST HAVE SPECIAL

AND THUS USEFUL POWERS.

'And you want me to chat about them? You have a keen sense of hope! I

reserve my right to remain silent. A right which is very easy in this place.'

I DO NOT WANT YOU TO TALK WITH ME. I WANT YOU TO WALK

WITH ME.

'You seem, honoured sir, to be unexpectedly well informed,' said Nayigeren testily.

'But why weren't you with the other Magi?'

Nayigeren shuffled his feet in the dust.

'Caspar and Melchior? We harmonised for a while in the search for future

prediction; but outside of that they danced in the same pair of shoes while I skipped

to a different beat. Then Balthazar did)oin us, and, despite my hopes, he moved to

their rhythm and not mine, looking upwards instead of forward. So I decided to trip

my own measure and lost touch with the others.'

'But why are you here now? The light ofthe star that went supernova on that

prestigious night has long died.'

'Stars! Stars and Fables! That is what the other three were always on about, too. I

am not following a star. I used a different way to gaze forward and found this day as

the parting of the old world and the new.'

'I get it,' said the Doctor. 'The other three wise men were astrologers, but you're a

chronologer... They looked to the stars for guidance while you made a forecast based

on future time.' He smiled. 'No wonder you were out of step. You're a time traveller.'

I NEED TO SYNCHRONISE YOUR FOOTSTEPS WITH MY MIND IN

ORDER TO ACHIEVE MY ENDS. I WILL POSE YOU A QUESTION TAKEN

FROM YOUR MIND. YOU MUST COME UP WITH THE ANSWER AND

PACE IT OUT ALONG THE PATH I HAVE CONSTRUCTED.

'Why should P'

IF YOU DO NOT YOU WILL REMAIN STATIONARY. DON'T TAKE

YOUR TIME. TAKE MINE. I HAVE PLENTY TO SPARE.

'How kind.,

YOU HAVE A THING CALLED CHRISTMAS AT THE FOREFRONT OF

YOUR MIND.

'So?'

SO, YOUR FIRST CLUE IS: WHICH CHRISTMAS SHOULD YOU BE AT

AND WHAT SHOULD YOU HAVE FOR IT?

The Doctor regarded the Magus with renewed interest. He now saw that the black and

white sections of his robes were evenly spaced, presumably to represent nights and

days. The bejewelled ornament he wore round his neck was a miniature sun dial and

the coronet he wore had the merest silver sliver of a new moon just off the ***centre*** *of his brow. There was an overly high black cranial cover to the coronet, which seemed to*

mask some bulkiness, like a small metal block.

The sliver ofthe moon he saw, looking up, was a replica ofthe moon's current

phase. It appeared to be a large pearl, half black and half white, suspended through

its lateral axis and if the metallic block was machinery of some description it would

automatically rotate in unison with the lunar cycle and, yes, the pearl would rotate

around the coronet on a 28-day basis. The Doctor was witnessing the first application

of clockwork, 700 years before it would be recorded in China.

'But where is the baby to whom I'm performing this visitation?' asked Nayigeren.

'I am afraid your calculations are a tad out,' said the Doctor.

'They cannot be. I have checked and rechecked again and then again. At most I

could be a quarter month astray'.

'A bit more than that, old chap. You've missed it by almost jour years.'

The Doctor stood ruminating, but not about the question he had been

posed. He was not sure how long he had been in total blackness. It could

have been four minutes; it could have been four days.

He was trapped in a space not much bigger than his body. The invisible

walls were not hard but yielded to his touch. The first time he reached

out tentatively with his right hand, something touched him on the left

side. He jerked away and the touching stopped. He realised that he was

in a rectangular box of square cross-section and that opposite sides

compensated for disturbances. The only way he was going to move was by

answering the clue.

The more powerful an entity, the more powerful its ego, the Doctor

thought. Although beyond a certain level the ego completely disappeared,

which was much more interesting - but an entity with an ego this size

could be relied on eventually to make a huge error of judgment.

He directed his thoughts to the posed question.

What Christmas should he be at? One in the past, one in the future,

or... yes, that was it. It didn't matter whether he celebrated Christmas in

the Middle Ages or the year 2500. As a Time Lord, they were always in his

present.

'Not very challenging,' he murmured. Even as he thought his answer the

square underneath him lit up with a large letter P.

He pressed the wall to the right but it did not yield, nor yet did the other

three walls, but the intersection between the right and bottom walls did

and so he moved into a new containing square, which lit up with an R, He

kept moving in the same diagonal direction and in six steps had spelled

out the word 'present'. The letters remained lit up in the darkness behind

him.

THE SECOND CLUE IS: A SORT OF DOOR THAT HAS LED YOU TO

WHERE YOU ARE NOW.

'My present is four years adrift! Caspar and Melchior had the right of it? They were

on time?'

The Doctor nodded sympathetically.

'But I was so sure,' Nayigeren almost wailed. 'This is the crux of time. This is the

door through which the new age commences

You are correct in your calculations. It is your relativity that is adrift. The

time-

change was not brought about spontaneously by the birth but was calculated over

half a millennium later by a scholarly monk named Dionysius. Charming old soul,

but a bit hazy on dates. Given what he was working with its amazing he got as close

as four years.'

'A sort of door that has led me here?' mused the Doctor T h e door to the

TARDIS? No. The mathematical back door which allowed me to slip into

this vacuole? No. A type of door? Of course!' The Doctor realised. T h e

answer is where this entity thinks I am now.'

He was already standing on the first letter of the answer and this time

the letters were made through the upper right diagonal as he walked

through the word 'trap'.

CLUE THREE: IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH IT HAS GONE. IN YOUR CASE

IT HAS.

'Sounds *as* though... means I'm dealing with a homonym,' thought the

Doctor, contemplating the entity's motivation.

What it was doing was quite impressive. The entity was skirting round

the outskirts of his mind, but it wanted to get deeper. It was forcing him

to use lateral thought, which would open up passageways to other areas

of his mind. It was linking his thought pattern to itself by proscribing

the pattern of his walking. If he didn't think of the answers, he could not

move, but if he did think them he was letting the entity deeper in.

The greater the ego the greater the paranoia, thought the Doctor. He

paced out the word 'past' through the lower right diagonal, looked over his

shoulder at the three lines of illuminated letters that he had walked along

and sighed in exasperation. How many clues would he have to solve?

CLUE FOUR: AND NOW TO THE CONFUSED THING FROM WHICH

YOU WILL TRAVEL NO MORE.

'Might I enquire how you achieve your time travelling?' the Doctor asked the glum

Magus. 'If it isn't too much of a secret.'

'It is not for the ears of fools and disbelievers, but your knowledge and your presence suggests to me that you too have trawled the shallows of time?'

He examined the Doctor's ambiguous smile and continued. 'I thought so! Well the

genesis of my powers was very simple. I observed that the longest hours of my life

were those listening to the lectures of my allocated teacher, the illustrious Professor Zen Yang. Similarly the shortest hours of my life were those spent disporting with the gracious Lady Wulunheshi, which passed like liquid lightening. I assumed that from

a human standpoint time was subjective and that by crystallising that subjectivity

one could use one's mind to skim over the surface of true time like a sandboard down

the side of a dune. In this way I could collect snatches of the future. It is not an exact science, but I have trained my mind and by picking up many floral tidbits one can

plan out an entire garden. May I enquire how you eject your temporal journeying?'

'I use a little blue box,' said the Doctor.

The secret to this clue was 'confused', the Doctor reasoned. It meant that

the word 'thing' was an anagram. The entity kept reaffirming that he was

trapped in time, and the time was emphasised by the total blackness, like

the night He walked 'tonight' in a north-easterly direction.

YOUR FIFTH CLUE FOLLOWS: OTHERS HAVE BEEN TRAPPED IN

TIMELY WAYS. THIS IS THE PRISON OF THE BARMY BONNETEER.

The Doctor realized that the symbolism, the words, and the very

language - 20th-century English - were being pulled out of his thoughts;

but he was slightly uncomfortable with the easy way the entity was

stringing them together.

The Barmy Bonneteer? The Mad Hatter! The Doctor had met the man

who called himself Lewis Carroll once, briefly - a surprisingly serious

young man for someone with such an extravagant imagination.

In his first Alice book she had met the Hatter who had quarrelled with

Time, who had forever trapped him at six o'clock in perpetual...

'Teatime' - the Doctor walked from square to square, but this time

downwards, one letter below another.

CLUE SIX: AND NOW CONVERSELY GIVE OUT WHERE YOU LIVED.

'Conversely' meant 'in reverse'. He lived in time. 'Give out' was its

converse. Time backwards is...

He paced out 'emit' retracing the letters he had previously trod.

'This is getting boring,' growled the Doctor in the silence of the void.

ONE LAST CLUE TAKES YOU TO YOUR FINAL DESTINATION. HERE

IS CLUE SEVEN: IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH IT FLOWS THEREFORE IT IS

A FLOWER.

'I must find the baby's family,' said Nayigeren in anguish. Terrible deeds are

threatened - the slaughter of souls as innocent as flowers.'

The deeds have already taken place. Herod, who ordered the massacre, has been

dead for more than three years. But the family was warned and fled.'

'Fled where? There are other things of which I must warn them.'

'To Egypt, I believe.'

'J have always wanted to visit Egypt!' exclaimed the Time Magus. 'Where they

transform their deserts into sundials with massive gnomons.'

'I don't think that was the purpose of the pyramids,' mused the Doctor. 'Will

you stay and watch the coming of the new age with me? Your timing for that was

absolutely accurate.'

'No! Four years have flowed by me heedlessly. Time untied waits for no man. I must

not tarry. Goodbye, my goodly friend, I am forever indebted to your noble self.'

Nayigeren bowed respectfully to the Doctor, then turned and hurried back down

the street.

'Hold on!' called the Doctor to the retreating figure. 'Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh

and... What gift do you bring for the baby?'

The Magus stopped and turned. 'I bring mistletoe,' he said.

This was another homonym and a pun on the word 'flower'. A flower isn't

always of the garden variety. Time flows, so it is a 'flow-er'. For the first

time the walls constrained him to stride logically, left to right from the

middle T in the word 'teatime'. He strode out the word 'thyme'.

YOU HAVE REACHED YOUR DESTINATION. YOU CANNOT TRAVEL

BACK IN THYME. HO. HO. HO. THIS FINAL E THAT YOU STAND ON

STANDS FOR YOUR ETERNITY.

'So here I rest?' the Doctor asked sarcastically.

NO. I WILL G R A N T YOU SOME MOVEMENT TO PROVE YOUR

POWERLESSNESS. I'LL GIVE YOU THE NEXT TWO CLUES TOGETHER.

EIGHT AND NINE: WHAT ARE YOU HERE FOR? IT SOUNDS LIKE A

WILD FRENCHMAN'S DREAM.

'I thought you said this was my final destination,' the Doctor protested.

Then he realised; he'd now got to the bottom of the entity's sneering sense

of humour. 'What are you here for?' he said out loud. If the entity had its

way he would be here for...

The walls directed him downwards and he briskly stepped out 'ever'.

Then he thought for a moment about the second part of the clue,

turned

round and equally briskly re-trod his steps, spelling 'reve'.

VERY GOOD. NOW THE SAME AGAIN IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

The Doctor now moved upwards from the E, again spelling 'ever' and

its reverse.

'Are you losing your imagination?' he asked 'Crosswords never repeat

answers.'

BUT THIS IS NOT A CROSSWORD. THIS IS WHAT AND WHERE YOU

ARE. THIS IS THE ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION I ASKED YOU.

The question on the Doctor's mind was why the Time Magus was bearing a gift of

mistletoe.

Mistletoe had always been a plant of mystery. There had been a legend in the

Middle Ages that the cross on Calvary had been made of mistletoe. It had been cursed

never again to grow from the ground, but to shrink and only grow from other trees.

It was later brought into homes in winter with other evergreens as a pagan offering

to pray for the spring to come, and the concepts of rebirth had converted it into a

kissing-bough. Mistletoe 'stole time' in anagrammatic form - very suitable for the

lost Wise Man. Perhaps he should compose a Christmas Crossword, he mused. He

could call it 'Listen to the Tinsel'. Perhaps not. He abandoned the idea, but the idea did not abandon him.

The Doctor put these thoughts aside to concentrate on the midnight that was fast

approaching. He was at the location that had caused the change in time calculation.

He was going to look to the skies to where the supernova that had occurred at that

time would have shone. And he was hoping, without real hope, that he would hear a

sub-temporal click as BC changed to AD.

He never got to watch the change, however. As he scanned the night sky he noticed,

about 30 degrees galactic left, that a couple of stars had disappeared.

ONE FINAL ROUND OF FUTILITY AND THEN I SHALL LEAVE YOU.

'First I should have the chance to address myself to you properly,' said

the Doctor indignantly.

YOU ADDRESS ME? DO YOU NOT REALISE WHO IS IN CONTROL?

'I'd say it's a matter of perspective. When a man trains a parrot to say

"Pretty Polly," the words are only forthcoming after he himself has said

"Who's a pretty boy then?" The man feels constrained to say this quite

regularly, so who has trained whom? I have followed your directions and

thereby I have discovered your weaknesses.'

WHAT ARE MY WEAKNESSES?

'Your powerfulness, your intelligence and your self-interest.'

INDEED. YOU MUST TELL ME OF MY STRENGTHS SOME TIME.

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS I HAVE GROWN. THIS SPHERE THAT IS

ME DOUBLES IN SIZE ROUGHLY EVERY QUARTER-MILLION EARTH

YEARS. IN A BILLION YEARS I WILL BE FORMIDABLE INDEED.

'You gaze far into the future. Your long focus hides your present

problem.'

WHAT PROBLEM DO I HAVE IN THE PRESENT?

'Me.'

THEN ALLOW ME TO PRESENT YOUR FINAL CLUE. THIS IS ONE

ONLY YOU ALONE CAN SOLVE. WHERE WERE YOU AT YOUR

HAPPIEST?

The Doctor thought and it came to him. A memory of a word dredged up

from a long time ago, almost forgotten - the answer to a favourite riddle

from his Gallifreyan childhood. This time, he knew, the path would be a

circular one starting and ending with the letter E.

As his feet dragged in a counter-clockwise arc, he worried. If the entity

was already able to delve so deeply in his mind as to find this last word,

what else had it seen?

The Doctor circled round to the back ofthe stable and in through the door. The only

things in there were a disgruntled cat, which growled at him from under a corncrib,

and the TARDIS. He ignored the former and entered the latter.

It is one of Earth's great misconceptions that stars are randomly placed. Using

seventh-dimensional geometry they can be accurately plotted. This the

Doctor knew,

and he also knew that they could not vanish. He focused his instruments along the

line he had been looking and soon, in the depths of space, discovered the absence of

readings, which pointed to the presence of a space vacuole blotting out the two stars.

Space vacuoles are still not well understood. They are microscopic or macroscopic.

They are perfectly spherical. They are self-sustaining: some expand, some shrink to

nothing. They exert a reverse-TARDIS effect inasmuch as their interiors are much

smaller than their exteriors. They had been called holes in space.

But these holes are hungry. They absorb whatever they come in contact with.

Moreover, they are occasionally used as bases by creatures that are intelligent by

necessity and belligerent by choice.

Vacuoles needed investigating to see what state they were in, thought the Doctor, as

curiosity got the better of him. There were always two weak axial points in a vacuole

and by whittling one's mathematics into a skeleton key one could break in.

The Doctor made the necessary adjustments and directed the TARDIS into the

vacuole. Not knowing exactly what to expect, he threw his scarf an extra turn round

his neck and strode into the blackness.

The Doctor had finished his circle. He had spelled out

'everywhichwhile'

and landed back on the starting square 'E'. While he had been walking,

he had felt the build-up of a certain emotion... he was feeling cross. Cross

with the presumption and wasted abilities of this entity.

HERE I LEAVE YOU. YOU MAY GO UP AND DOWN OR ROUND IN A

CIRCLE UNTIL YOU FADE.

'Why are you doing this?'

BECAUSE I CAN. TO YOU I AM A GOD.

'You are no god.'

I CAN READ 96 DEFINITIONS OF GODHEAD IN YOUR THOUGHTS. I

FULFIL 28 OF THEM.

'You have not read deeply enough. There is one condition, which binds

them all. No true god needs to believe he is a god. Godhead transcends

power. Men are not gods to ants. They can crush ants and create things far

beyond an ant's small brain, but that does not make them gods. Imagine

a man driving a car when a single ant stings him. The car crashes. The

sophisticated machinery is wrecked, the man is exterminated, but the ant

emerges alive.'

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PHILOSOPHIES. I SHALL LEAVE THEM ON

THE SIDE OF THE PLATE WHEN I HAVE FINISHED OFF YOUR MIND.

The Doctor looked at the word path he had trodden. The letters in the

answers to the clues shone in bright white lines behind him. The overall

pattern seemed to spell the word OHM.

An ohm was a unit of resistance - he would be the ultimate unit of

resistance. He uncurled a neckful of scarf.

GOODBYE FOR EVER. UNLESS YOU HAVE A LAST WORD.

'Funny you should ask that. As a matter of fact I do. You obviously

understand the power of words. I would like to say one final thing.'

WOULD YOU? HOW DELICIOUS. WHAT WILL IT BE? MOCK HEROISM?

GALLOWS HUMOUR? ABJECT PLEADING? I SHALL RECORD IT IN MY

SPACE FOR EVER. WHAT WILL IT BE? YOU DECIDE.

'"I decide" is an anagram of "deicide ",' said the Doctor, quieter than the silence.

DID YOU SAY SOMETHING? REPEAT IT, I HAVE ALL MY RECEPTIVE

ORGANS STRAINING TO HEAR YOU. YOU OBVIOUSLY THINK YOU

CAN REVERSE MY DECISION. RIDICULOUS. HOW?

The Doctor watched the letters fade and brought from the recesses of

his mind thoughts about the first space vacuole he had ever encountered,

many years before this one had forced him to answer its clues.

It was early in his travels when he had come upon an arachno-insectoid

race that called themselves the Scorliocz. They were streamlined in shape,

looked as though they were clad in stainless steel with matted clusters of

corrosion and rust, and hated everything. He learned their creed, which

expressed their urge to destroy every other sentient being - some because

they were stronger, some because they were weaker - and having achieved

this perfection of cleansing to perfect it more by one glorious apotheotic

moment of self-destruction.

It was one single, devastating word.

The word was not much spoken by the Scorliocz, any more than a man

would say "I live"; but it was burnt into their brains and hard-wired into

their genes.

The Doctor had come across them at the time they had overrun their

own planet and had constructed machinery to leave the planet and hit the

universe. The Doctor had lured them into a shrinking space vacuole where

they were trapped for ever. Whether they were alive or dead or both, like

Schrodinger's cat, the Doctor did not have the feline curiosity to find out.

But he did remember their creed.

Gathering up his anger at the entity, he concentrated it into this one

poisonous word.

He breathed in deeply. The word OH appeared in large white letters in

the space in front of him. He spoke the Scorliocz Creed with contempt.

M * * * * * * * . Only the first letter M appeared, huge and white and pulsing;

the others were projected as giant, writhing asterisks.

The silence deepened. Then something happened in the vacuole that

had never happened before. There came colour.

The letters and asterisks turned a ghastly red, which lit up the vacuole

as none ofthe white lights had done. The blackness gave way to a murky,

hellish glow. The silence remained, but subsonic rumbles were felt by the

Doctor like the pre-shock of an earthquake; the start of a soundless scream

by the entity.

The force that had imprisoned the Doctor had gone and he could now

see where the TARDIS stood. He hurried towards it with his hands over

his ears.

The letters he had trod were expanding and turning jagged. Bubbling

into them and then outflowing from them seethed red magma or plasma,

impossible to tell which, pushed up from below.

The Doctor made the door of the TARDIS, fumbled with it and then was

in. He hit the switch for emergency take off and disappeared.

He missed the silent scream hitting a supersonic peak, and the space

vacuole simultaneously imploding and exploding in perfect unison.

Where there had been a gigantic hole in space there was suddenly nothing

and the vacuum of space rushed in.

The Doctor did not think back to the powerful entity that used its

potentialities to such self-serving ends. He thought back to Nayigeren and

his selfless attitude to help others. Good times come from good thoughts.

The Doctor felt sullied by his interface with the entity. He needed a good

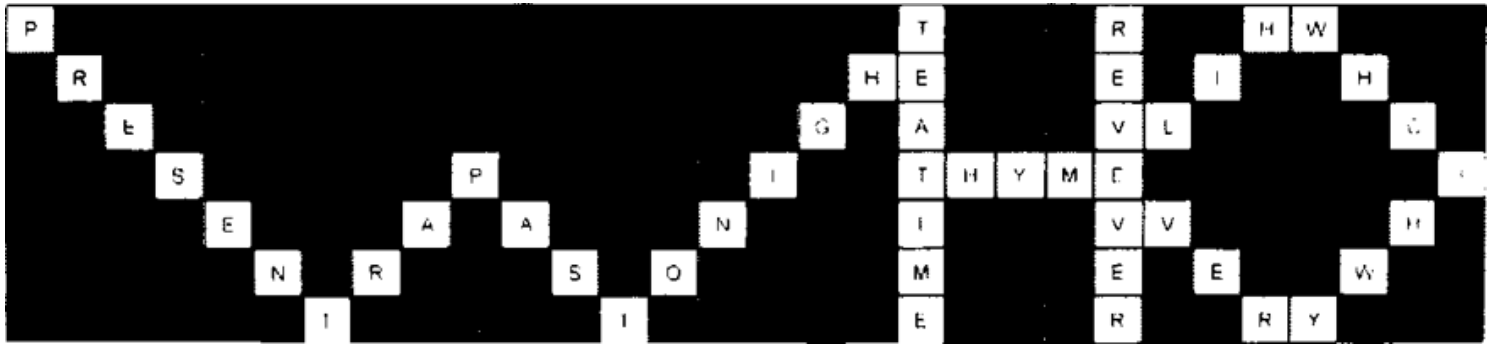
dose of something to clear it.

Christmas would do it! He would take a course of seven over as many

days and covering as many centuries. But first he was going to Druidic

England where, with the help of the silver sonic sickle he had somewhere

about the TARDIS, he was going to harvest several armfuls of mistletoe.


PRESENTATION
THE GAP
THYME
RIVER
VALLEY
VVE
HIWAY
HIGH
WAY
RY

Kiritimati, also known as Christmas Island, is a Pacific Ocean atoll where nuclear tests were conducted by the UK in the late 1950s. It is the first inhabited place on Earth to experience the New Year each year.

Pacific *Ocean* 1988

Dateline to Deadline

Ian Farrington

An adventure of the Third Doctor

Some *general* things to research once I get back to London

The history of the company - when was it formed? Who by?

Exactly how many ships does it have?

The European Championship - whilst chatting to Vincent (see

Dictaphone tape 13), he said to me that the USSR played West Germany

in the semis. I'm certain they played Italy. If I use the conversation in

the book, I don't want to make him out to be a fool, so an invisible edit

of the quotation may be in order if he's wrong and I'm right.

Myths of the ocean? The Atlantic leg of the journey wasn't quite as

eventful as I'd hoped. Perhaps I'll need some stuff to pad the days

out when it comes to writing the book. Let's hope not, but some juicy

nonsense about sea monsters or something could be useful.

Crew of t he N e p t u n e ;

Captain Hatcher:

Balding, bulky and squat. Has obviously lived his life to the full.

Whereas the crew seem to dress however they like, Hatcher and his

bridge officers have proper, white uniforms. Always spotless. Very

impressive, and help sell the idea that this is a businesslike ship with

a naval hierarchy.

Others:

There are about 20 crew including engineers, at least a dozen

workmen

(presumably most of their duties are when the Neptune is in port) and a

few officers. Over lunch in the mess room (smaller than you'd imagine;

no windows; old film posters on its walls) I tried in vain to tell two of the

crew what I was doing. The conversation went something like this (didn't

have my Dictaphone with me, so this is from memory):

Me: I'm travelling round the world.

Vincent Why?

Me: I'm writing a book -

Vincent What about?

Me: Well, about travelling around the world.

Terry: Ben! They have airplanes, you know!

Me: Yes, but I'm writing a book about travelling. I started in London and

I'm going west - the plan is to get back to London and do the whole

journey by sea. I want to experience how different crews deal with life on

the seas in the 1980s, so I'm doing each leg of the trip on board a new ship.

Also, that way, I get to meet lots of people and find out about their lives.

Vincent (taking the mick, I think): Flying would be quicker, you know.

I tried to explain, but they weren't having any of it. So, I told them about

my Atlantic leg - it turned out that Terry had been to Folkstone once or

twice, and I pretended to know some pub or other he'd been to there. They

asked how I'd found America (Turned left at Greenland' - ha, ha!) and I

had to say that I'd hardly set foot in it. How long was I actually on land?

NB. The cargo ship (Diamond) that took me to California had docked at just after

4pm local time. And by 9pm, I was aboard the Neptune, ready for it to pull out of

the harbour and head across the Pacific. So, since I left Britain more than three weeks ago, I've had less than five hours on land!

Christmas on the Neptune:

It'll be Christmas in three days, not that you'd know it from the crew. There

are no decorations, no tree, no sense that we're three days away from the

big day. Not that any of that suits me - I've never liked Christmas. The

same routine every year; the same traditions; the same food and music and

cliches and colours and sounds and weather. Peter at the publishers' office

gave me a strange look when I told him I was going to schedule the trip

between November and April. He couldn't understand why anyone would

want to be away from home over Christmas. But to me, it's a blessing.

Facts - the Neptune:

Okay, some details about the boat (good background stuff, this).

244 metres long.

Weighs 42,872 tonnes.

Carries cargo containers - dozens of the big metal things (will do a proper count at some point), all stacked one on top of the other and filling the majority of the hull and deck.

She sails around the world - California to California, via Tokyo, South Korea, Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Suez Canal, Halifax (the one in Canada), New York and Panama - in just 63 days.

More thoughts:

Perhaps I should forget about getting off in Japan, and just stay aboard here until Suez - a quick cruise around the Med and then find a fishing boat in the Bay of Biscay, and I'd be home in no time.

Another thing: I knew I should have brought more cassettes. When I was packing, I kept thinking, Travel light Only take the essentials.' But after three weeks and dozens of listens, I finally got bored with Neil Young. That carefully assembled C90 I put together before I left got thrown overboard into the ocean last night during a late-night stroll around the deck. (If I never hear My My, Hey Hey again, it'll be too soon!) Oh, look at me - I'm slagging off Neil Young. Twenty-four days at sea and I'm going mad, all because I only packed three cassettes for my Walkman. And due to

a

moment of rage, I'm going to have to survive on two Beatles compilations

for the next seven weeks. I wonder if the Neil Young tape will ever be

found? In 2015, when everyone's living in underwater cities, will my

discarded C90 be found lying on the bottom of the Pacific? (Do cassettes

sink? It'd float, actually, wouldn't it?)

NB. I'm going to have to make more of a concerted effort to talk to the crew, find

out about their lives and their routine. I can't Jill 30,000 words on the ship's specs and what became of a Neil Young tape! I did speak to some of them again at lunch

- Vincent said something that made me smile, and could be of use for the book.

Vincent:

French, about 18, works in engineering.

Tall, dark hair. Always chirpy but looks like he's been up all night; a

bit like Charlie Sheen in Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

Seems to habitually wear a red T-shirt with holes in.

We were discussing the Captain, and I said he seemed like a cynical man.

Vincent didn't know the word, so I tried to explain.

'Oh, you mean his glass is half full!' he said.

'Well, no,' I said. 'That means you're optimistic. Positive. Upbeat. When

someone thinks the worst is going to happen, you say they always think

their glass is half empty.'

He looked suspiciously at me. 'Half full. Half empty. It's the same thing.

Ifyou were optimistic, your glass would be full to the brim!'

At breakfast, I asked Vincent if I could shadow him for the day. He's

young and cheeky, so I hoped he'd be fun to hang out with and make for

an interesting character when I write all this up properly. Again, he didn't

quite seem to understand why I'd want to do this -I said I needed material

for the book. The whole reason for writing a travelogue is to meet people

as you travel, and find out more about their lives. That's what I told my

editor, anyway. (Didn't tell him it was more like an excuse to get away from

home for a bit. Get away from Christmas!)

Anyway, Vincent said I could follow him round for the day - most of

his duties turned out to be quite menial. Cleaning, etc. He is ostensibly in

charge of the engines, so I suppose I expected him to be fiddling with huge

machines and sweating in a loud, claustrophobic access tunnel. But his

daily routine seemed to take him wherever the work was. The boat - no,

strike that, ship. Must remember not to refer to the Neptune as a boat. The

ship is big, of course, and throughout the course of the afternoon I must

have covered a few miles. Vincent mopped decks, ran errands. He had an

obviously well-worn routine, but, whereas I would have found that soul-

destroying, he went about it all in an upbeat, infectious mood. Perhaps

it was all for my benefit - maybe the Captain had told him to give a good

impression to the foreign visitor - but I don't think so.

At various points during the day, I recorded a few of our chats. (See

Dictaphone tapes 13 and 14 - and I must remember to post them home as

soon as we reach port. I freed so much space in my bag when I was in LA

by sending the first 12 cassettes back to London.) Vincent's accent is clear,

and he knows his stuff. He told me all about his time on various ships, and

I think he would have told me his entire life story if I hadn't steered the

conversation. (Steered! Good one. Must remember to use nautical allusions

in the book.)

NB. Am I actually cut out to be a travel writer? I spend the day with this interesting lad - a French sailor, who I'd probably never cross paths with if I hadn't organised

this trip - and I can't summon up the enthusiasm to listen to his story. But that's

the whole point of this type of book, isn't it? To meet people you wouldn't otherwise

meet, learn about them, and tell their story. I'm kidding myself ifI think this

book

is going to be about some great big naval conspiracy or if I'm going to be the on-the-

spot witness to some world-significant event. It's people like Vincent who I should be detailing, getting to know. I should learn to just let the subjects talk; I can always cut the boring bits later, can't I?

We had dinner in the mess with Terry, and I asked them both about

Christmas. I wondered whether it was going to be celebrated at all on the

ship.

'We will have a meal, I think,' said Vincent. 'But we still have duties to

perform. The Captain prefers it quiet.'

In fact, the whole operation here is very low-key but tightly run - you

could almost say it was ship-shape! Much more organised than aboard the

Diamond (I'd sometimes wondered if we'd ever get across the Atlantic) and

even I can see the results - we're making better speed, and should be in

Asia by New Year's Day. (Blimey, it'll be 1989 - we're nearly in the 90s!)

'In any event,' added Terry, 'it won't be Christmas Day. Not on this

ship.'

I had no idea what he was on about, and at first I assumed it was

something to do with the Captain. Was he anti-Christmas, perhaps?

Had he banned all things festive from the Neptune? Then, from the deep

recesses of my mind, it popped into place...

'We're going to skip a day,' I said, realising. 'The International Date

Line.'

Ever since leaving London - or more specifically Greenwich, I suppose

- I've been crossing time zones and changing my watch. And now, when

we sail over the date line, we'll lose an entire day in order to balance the

books. According to Vincent, we'll hit the line at approximately midnight

tomorrow night: in an instant, our onboard time will skip directly from

the start of 25 December to the start of 26 December. We'll miss out

Christmas Day, entirely.

'Like Jules Verne in reverse,' said Terry (black, with shaven head.

Californian, mid-20s).

NB. In Verne's Around the World in Eighty Days, which I found a copy of on the

shelves of the ship's mess, Phileas Fogg circumnavigated the world in the opposite

direction to me, and he gained a day by crossing the date line. I'm losing one! For the first time in my life, I won't have to avoid Christmas Day. It's avoiding me!

Saturday 24 December 1988

Oh, God. This is awful. I don't know what to say. Just after I'd finished writing up my notes on Friday night, the Captain came to see me and told me that Vincent was dead. Murdered. His body was found in the engineering decks - the engines have been sabotaged as well - the two must be connected surely. Then today...

Wait. I need to take this carefully and slowly, record as much as I can remember - because of the speed and madness of everything that happened, I totally forgot to get the Dictaphone out. How helpful that would be now, having to write this! I must get it all down as accurately as I can. Heavens know why - it's not like I can use any of it in the book - but I can't think what else to do. I guess I feel that I have to write it down to make sense of it in my own mind.

In the morning, of course, the whole crew was in shock about Vincent. The mess was very quiet. The Captain very subdued. I saw Terry across the table, and he looked ashen and I think he was shaking.

The day crawled - no one was in the mood for talking. Everyone seemed to just go about their duties, going through the motions. Were they wondering - like I was - who was the murderer on board? The Captain had made sure that everyone worked in groups - what else could he do? The

ship has to carry on, regardless.

At Captain Hatcher's request (no, insistence), I spent the whole day on

the bridge, high up at the top of the ship's main structure. Its windows

looked out across the cargo containers, which creaked and whistled in the

rough Pacific conditions, and on towards the horizon to the west.

Then, in the evening, the calm was broken.

As we all gathered to eat, in through the mess door came a man I'd not

seen before - I was just thinking to myself that it was unlikely someone

like him had been aboard the Neptune all this time without me seeing him,

when it became clear that no one else had any idea who he was either. He

was middle-aged. Had white hair. Was tall and imposing and confident

He wore an elaborate red coat, almost like a cape.

Captain Hatcher came in behind him, and asked us all to be quiet.

'Listen,' he said. 'I know we're all in shock, but everyone needs to

concentrate. This is...' He motioned towards the stranger.

The Doctor,' the man said, taking a step forward. Thank you, Captain.'

He was English, with a posh accent, but somehow he had an immediately

calming effect on everyone in the room. I liked him. Thinking about it

now, as I try to write all this up, I wonder why I didn't suspect that he had

killed Vincent. But I didn't.

'I understand the Neptune has a schedule to keep. Captain Hatcher tells

me you need to reach Tokyo by your deadline, or the company incurs a

rather hefty fine. So, first things first, who's the chief engineer? We need

to see what's wrong with the ship, and see if we can't get the speed back

to what's required.'

Everyone was a little taken aback - me included. Someone had been

murdered, and the company was more worried about meeting a deadline

than catching the killer. (The Doctor told me later that this was part of his

plan. Putting the engines right might cause the killer to implicate himself.)

Terry stood up. 'I'm in charge ofthe engines now that Vincent...' Then his

face changed. 'What of it?' he spat.

The Doctor was just about speak, then the Captain cut him off, saying

something like, Terry! Show some respect.' It seems that, last night,

when the death was discovered, Captain Hatcher sent a message to the

company. Standard procedure. Makes sense. Then, this afternoon the

Doctor arrived. The Captain told us he'd been sent by the company from

their office in Hawaii to investigate the death. Presumably he'd arrived by

helicopter? I didn't get a chance to ask.

'Don't worry,' said the Doctor. 'We'll get to the bottom of things.'

You could sense the mood change in the room - nerves, tension and

fear. Terry looked across at me. (At the time, I was certain he thought that

I had had something to do with Vincent's murder. Now, of course, I know

the truth.) Terry made a move for the door, and the Captain followed him

into the corridor. The Doctor was about to go with them, then stopped and

turned to me. He must have clocked me as different. I was clearly not part

of the crew, and had been skulking at the back of the mess.

'Ben,' I said. 'Ben Anderson.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Yes. Yes, you are, aren't you? You're the travel writer.

Well, my friend, it's a pleasure to meet you.'

He stuck out a hand, which I shook. Presumably the company or the

Captain had told him that I was aboard, and explained what I was doing.

'You're not bad, you know,' said the Doctor. 'I like your books a great

deal.'

'I've actually only written one book,' I said. 'Abiding Timetables and

Avoiding Tourists. I went from Land's End to John O'Groats just using public

transport. It came out in the summer. It's done quite well so far.'

The Doctor rubbed the back of his neck and said, 'Well, yes... You'll

write better than that one, I'm sure. One day.' He grinned at me. 'Come

along, Ben. Follow us. You may find it interesting, although whether it'll

make good material for your book is another matter.'

The Doctor led us down to the engineering decks, via numerous

corridors and metal staircases. The Captain and Terry were silent as

we walked, both looking very worried and nervous. The Doctor strode

purposefully along - I remember thinking that not only did he know his

way around a cargo container but he was obviously used to taking charge

in difficult situations.

We reached the engineers' station, a small room deep in the ship's

bowels, and the Doctor spent a good few minutes looking at readouts and

computer data. He asked questions of both the Captain and Terry, and

didn't seem to have any difficulty in understanding their answers. In fact, I

think they were both taken aback that an investigator knew so much about

the engines.

He then led us down to the back of the ship, to the turbine room. In

near-deafening conditions, the Doctor called out more questions and

poked about with the equipment Although I couldn't hear him, I could see

that he was singing along to himself as he worked. All through this, I kept

wondering why he'd asked for me to be there. I felt a bit uncomfortable.

After all, I don't know anything about engines.

'Come along, gentlemen,' he shouted at last. 'Let's go somewhere we

can talk.'

Back in the engineers' station, the Doctor sat at the chief's desk.

'Well, Ben?' he asked me. 'Who do you think killed poor Vincent?'

'Me? Why are you asking me?'

'Because you're not part of the crew. You're an outsider. You've only been

here, what, a few days? You've spent that time talking, listening, watching.

Researching your book. And you're a fine writer. Or, at least, you will be.'

I didn't know what to say - what he wanted me to say.

'Come on, Ben. Don't think, just answer. Go with what your guts tell

you.'

'I have no idea, Doctor. How could I know who killed him?'

'Because you're observant'

I couldn't think of anything to say.

'Doctor?' The Captain stepped in. 'What about the engines? I am sorry

to sound mercenary, but... '

'Oh, yes,' he said. 'It's a bit o f a botch job, I'm afraid, but I think you'll

find that you can now order full speed ahead, Captain. It'll hold up to

Tokyo all right'

'Thank you, Doctor.' The Captain then left us, heading up to the bridge

to get the ship back on schedule.

Terry left too. 'I'd better get to work,' he said.

The Doctor swivelled in his chair towards me, and motioned for me to close the door. I was alone with this bizarre man. He just stared at me at first, an odd expression on his face.

'So... ' I said, getting nervous and trying to make conversation. The company sent you to investigate the death.'

'Oh, I was sent all right. But it wasn't by the company.' And that smile again, almost like he thought I was in on the joke or something. I asked if it was usual for someone to be flown out to a ship when there'd been a death. The Doctor said something obscure, something like: I assume so.

But, somehow, I didn't question him, didn't doubt that he was whiter than white. He was that sort of person. Despite everything that was going on, I felt like I could trust him.

'This wasn't a random killing, Ben,' he said. T h e fact the engines were tampered with shows us that. Whoever attacked poor Vincent wanted him out of the way. Didn't want him around to put right the damage that was then caused to the engines. Our murderer wanted the ship to come to a stop.'

'He didn't do very well then,' I said. T h e ship didn't stop. It just slowed down a bit.'

That smile. Very avuncular, very friendly. 'You're right, Ben. Very observant. The turbine wasn't touched, only peripheral equipment that controls the speed. The death wasn't discovered for a few hours... '

'So he would have had enough time to bring the whole ship to a stand-still, leave us dead in the water, if he wanted to?'

'Indeed,' the Doctor said. 'Come on.'

He swept from the room, and I followed. A few minutes later we were up on the bridge. The Captain was there, a few other crewmen too.

Confidently, the Doctor went straight to a table where some charts were laid out. He scanned the maps.

'Doctor?' asked the Captain. 'Any progress?'

'Not yet, Captain Hatcher,' he said. 'Ben, look at these.'

I joined him at the table, and looked over the chart in front of him. It was of the entire Pacific Ocean. I'm not sure how useful it had been to the bridge crew, though - whereas other charts were creased, dog-eared and well used, this one was clean and crisp. Hardly used.

'Ben.' The Doctor was whispering to me, up close. 'Why would someone want to slow the ship - but not stop it?'

'Perhaps they're really keen to celebrate Christmas,' I whispered back, joking through my nerves.

The Doctor glanced across at a computer readout. Little white numbers marked our latitude (it was about 3 8 , 1 think), our longitude (in the

170s),

the onboard time (it was getting late in the day) and the date.

'By jove, it's Christmas Eve,' said the Doctor. 'How wonderful. I haven't

had a Christmas since all that nonsense at UNIT HQ.' He looked at me,

his expression changing. 'Ben! You're a genius. Tell the others what you're

thinking.'

I racked my brains. He was testing me, and I sort of wanted to make him

proud - live up to his high expectations of me. I thought about everything

that had happened: Vincent's death, the sabotage, the ship losing speed,

Christmas... I looked out of the window at the vast ocean ahead of us.

The International Date Line,' I said, almost to myself. 'It was Terry who

reminded me. About the date changing. At the speed we were travelling,

we were due to miss out tomorrow entirely. Now, I suppose we'll get our

Christmas Day after all. Someone wants their Christmas, don't they?'

The Doctor nodded.

I noticed that Terry had walked onto the bridge and was talking to the

Captain in hushed tones. It was all very conspiratorial, a fact that didn't

escape the Doctor's notice. After a moment, the Captain told everyone to

leave - everyone except Terry, the Doctor and me, that is.

You could palpably sense the mood in the room change.

'Watch and learn, Ben,' said the Doctor. 'I think our killer is about to

reveal himself.'

'You're very clever for an insurance investigator,' said the Captain. 'Very

clever indeed.'

'Oh, I never said I was here to investigate the insurance implications.

You just assumed that, Captain.'

'What? Who are you, then?' barked Terry. 'Who sent you?'

'My people sent me, if you must know. They must have been very worried

about what was going on here. And I'm beginning to see why.'

He didn't elaborate -I still don't really know what he meant or who 'his

people' were. But Captain Hatcher knew, I could tell that straight away. He

took a step forward, threateningly, but Terry held him back.

'He cannot stop it now,' he said dismissively.

'Stop what?' I asked impulsively. 'You killed Vincent, didn't you? Why?

What else are you doing?'

'They've only completed half of their plan,' the Doctor said. He seemed

to be enjoying all this - he was actually taunting the Captain and Terry with

his tone. 'How annoying it must have been, Captain, when the company's

deadline forced you to cross the date line at such an inconvenient time. You

must have been angry about that.' He laughed. 'All that planning, getting

yourself aboard this ship. I imagine the real Captain Hatcher is back in,

where, California? You were getting ready for whatever it is you need to do

on Christmas Day... And then, the vagaries of time get in the way as they

so often do. If only you'd stayed on dry land, eh?'

'I'm sorry, I don't understand. What are they trying to do?' I asked.

The Captain and Terry stood silent, smug grins on their faces.

'I imagine it's something that requires a lot of open space. Somewhere

off the radar - metaphorically at least if not actually. Am I right?'

No answer.

'Well,' the Doctor continued. 'It's academic now, isn't it? We're on

schedule. Full steam ahead and all that We'll hit the date line promptly

at midnight, if my calculations are correct. December 24th nineteen -' He

paused, momentarily confused. 'Ben, what year is it?'

'Eighty-eight,' I said. It's only now that it sinks in: the Doctor had asked

me what year it was. How strange.

'December 24th 1988 will become December 26th 1988. You'll miss your

big day.'

'What difference does it make?' I asked. I was so interested in what the

Doctor was saying I was ignoring the other two men in the room! 'I mean,

it's already December 25th somewhere in the world, isn't it?'

'Indeed,' said the Doctor. 'You know, I was there in 1847 when

Greenwich Mean Time was adopted in Great Britain. Wonderful notion,

I've always thought - helps the trains run on time. How ironic that it's now

putting a spanner in your nautical works.' (Or something like that. I was

getting pretty confused. Then things got even stranger.)

'Enough!' shouted Terry in a way that scared me. He'd been so nice to

me on my first two days aboard, but that must have all been an act. Had he

been the one who'd actually killed Vincent, I wondered.

The Captain took a chain that had been around his neck, underneath

his jacket. On it was a key, which he inserted into a socket on one of the

dashboards. He looked over at the Doctor and smiled nastily.

'Don't do it,' said the Doctor. 'I swear to you that you'll regret it.'

'Not once we have been saved.'

'You think this will save you?'

'Well, we'll see, won't we? Once our ship is here.' The Captain looked

at his watch.

'You're rendezvousing with another ship?' I asked, trying to make sense

of things.

'I don't think he means a boat, Ben.' The Doctor turned to the Captain

and Terry. 'Turn the key and stop the Neptune from crossing the date line, is

that the plan? Make sure there's enough time for us to celebrate

Christmas

Day. Why is this time and place so important? Why can't your friends

simply come and meet you wherever you are?'

'That would be telling, Doctor,' said the Captain. He turned the key and

Terry started to laugh. I looked to the Doctor, expecting anger or worry to

be on his face. But there was that smile again.

'Oh, but I think I see,' he said. 'We're not rendezvousing with another

ship, are we? What is it - some kind of teleport? You have to be at a precise

location at a prearranged time?'

Terry stopped laughing, and the Captain looked worried. And then, I

realised that the pitch of the ship's engines was exactly the same as it had

been. Where was the drop-off of noise as the turbine cut out?

The Doctor still smiled. 'Oh, didn't I say?' he said, taking out a thin

object from his pocket - a metal, pen-shaped tool. 'While I was bodgering

about in the engine rooms, I added a little adjustment The engines are

locked, I'm afraid. The Neptune won't be celebrating Christmas this year.'

'No!' The Captain dashed forward, Terry too, going for the Doctor.

Before I could react, they had him, one arm each. I was wavering - not

knowing what to do - when suddenly, in an instant, the Doctor swivelled

round between them. He managed to free one hand, and it was quickly

on the Captain's shoulder, whose face contorted as he fell to the ground.

Terry swung for a punch, but the Doctor ducked in one fluid motion.

The Doctor pinched Terry's neck too, and whispered something in his

ear before the man fell to his knees. When *the* Doctor let go, Terry dropped

unconscious.

The bridge was calm - a few bleeps from the computer system

rhythmically breaking the silence. The Doctor breathed out in relief.

'Well, these two are going to be absent when their friends come to

collect them.'

'What was their plan?' I asked. 'Hatcher said they were going to be

saved.'

'Yes. The Captain and Terry are not, um... well, how can I put this?

They're not who they said they were. They are from somewhere much

further away and their... well, their "people" had arranged a pick-up to

take them home. The rendezvous had to be very precise, but Christmas

Day in the middle of the world's biggest ocean was meant to provide them

with some secrecy...' He looked out of the bridge's windows, across the

cargo containers and into the night sky.

'What did you mean, Doctor? You said something about a teleport'

'Well, yes.' He looked at me shiftily, like he didn't really know how to

phrase something. 'Look, Ben, some things are hard to explain.'

'Try me, Doctor.'

'What would you say if I told you that Terry and Captain Hatcher were

aliens?'

I stared at him, not sure if he was being serious or not Aliens? As in men

from outer space? Up until this point, the Doctor had been this calming

voice of reason - now, I was seriously doubting his sanity.

'What now, then?' I said, changing the subject 'What about Vincent?'

The Doctor paused. 'That's for someone more qualified than me to look

into, I'm afraid. It's not just Vincent they've killed. They've left a trail of

bodies behind them in their attempts to get home. I've only just managed

to catch up...' His voice trailed off sadly. 'I suggest we lock these two up

somewhere secure and I'll tip off some of my friends. They have contacts

in Tokyo who can deal with all this.'

After we'd moved the Captain and Terry, the Doctor spent most of the

night talking to the rest of the crew - he was a remarkable motivator,

getting everyone up and running and explaining things the best he could.

With two key positions on the ship vacant, everyone had to pull their

weight - even me. I spent the early hours checking the cargo containers

and carrying out the nightly task of making sure the rigging was fixed. I

double-checked every container, going through each row

methodically.

When I was confident a container was as it should be, I marked it off on

my clipboard. It made me feel like I was contributing.

As dawn broke, the Doctor came to find me. I'd just reached the last row

of containers - seven huge red metal boxes, all strapped together one on

top of another, as well as a smaller blue box. The blue box was standing

aside the containers, like a terraced house next to skyscrapers.

'Well, Ben,' the Doctor said. 'I think it's time I was going.'

'Is a helicopter due?'

'Something like that.' He offered his hand, and I shook it. 'Goodbye,

Ben. I hope to see you again one day.'

'You too, Doctor,' I said. 'I hope you don't have too long a wait. I've been

out here for an hour, and I'm freezing my you-know-whats off!'

'I'll be fine. You go inside, Ben, get some sleep. It's been a long night.'

I smiled and said goodbye.

I'm still not, as I write all this out, entirely sure what exactly has gone on

over the last 24 hours. Recording it here has, if anything, confused things

more. At the time, I'd not had the time to question just who the Doctor

was, what he was up to.

Was he just a crackpot? Had he been sent by the shipping company?

He'd solved the murder - but he hadn't managed to adequately explain

to me what the Captain and Terry's motives were. And he certainly had

some mad ideas. Aliens and teleports! Perhaps when I finally get home, I

should pitch a new book to my editor: travelling round the world, talking

to people who believe in all that kind of thing. Could be interesting...

I was halfway to the bulkhead door that leads into the ship's decks,

when I heard the Doctor yell out.

'And, Ben? Merry Christmas!'

Then he was gone.

There must have been a helicopter, but I didn't see it.

Some New Zealanders can't get enough of Christmas –they celebrate it twice each year: on 25 December and in July, which is mid-winter in New Zealand.

New Zealand 1980

Autaia Pipipi Pia

Beverley Allen

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Sarah Jane

Out in the Foveaux Strait, oysters were filter-feeding. They paused for a

second as a unique vibration set up small tremors in their shells. It was

gone as quickly as it arrived, moving north over the mountains and the

Tasman Sea. Just over Lake Taupo it stopped and then made a right turn

towards the Pacific.

Had the oysters been higher up the food chain, all of this might have

bothered them. If they'd known what irony was, they'd have laughed a lot

the next time there was an oyster-eating festival.

Away to the north, a canopy of brilliant white stars shone between

the clouds and beneath them a million avian creatures with slightly

bigger brains and more advanced nervous systems slept. Breathing slow,

heartbeats steady and undisturbed, cocooned against the dangers of the

dark by whatever method they could find.

The avian brain varies in the depth of its understanding. Pukeko were

tucked up in tussocks of grass undisturbed and safe from cars until

morning, while the kahus dozing in the trees dreamed deep and wicked

thoughts of rising thermals and the satisfying dive to death.

In the big rearing shed the only light should have come from the bulbs

overhead. Here avian minds were unconcerned by dangers they were as yet

innocent of; free from predators and free from the problem of where their

next meal was coming from, they nodded in the warm stillness. Their only

concern was the closeness of their neighbours.

The noise from above wasn't enough to panic them, although the waft

of rain-scented air as the roof vanished made them start, and perhaps

somewhere from the depths of an avian race memory there may have been

a hint of nostalgia for distant New England.

Legend has it turkeys are so stupid that in a rainstorm they will look at the

sky until they drown. They were looking up now and it was raining. It was

the last thing they ever saw, but they didn't drown. Their final thoughts, if

it could have been described as thoughts, were of faint surprise.

Sarah Jane Smith took in the art deco buildings, the sunshine and the

pohutukawa trees in full crimson bloom. The buildings suggested the

1930s, but the people all around were dressed for sunshine in the 1980s.

'Where are we?' she asked, warily.

'Earth!' the Doctor replied, happily.

'But you said it was Christmas,' Sarah Jane protested as she ran to keep

up with him. 'So why is it warm?'

'Because Napier is in the southern hemisphere and it's summer,' he

replied, striding off in the direction of an ice-cream seller. 'Hokey Pokey!

My favourite.' He handed her a well-laden cone and started off down the

street eating his own ice cream.

'It's December and the season to be jolly,' he said, gleefully. 'I've always

loved Christmas, ever since I was a little boy.'

Sarah raised an eyebrow.

'Christmas,' he said firmly, 'is a state of mind and not confined to

Earth.'

He'd finished his ice cream and was now gazing at the display of cakes

in a baker's window.

'What we need,' he announced, 'is a Christmas cake.'

She looked critically at the choice.

'Which one?' she asked.

'Oh, none of these,' he replied. 'We must make our own, of course!'

'Make it!' she squealed. 'Why?'

He stared at her for a second, then grinned.

'You can't scrape the bowl unless you make it yourself,' he said. 'You can

have the spoon.'

Before she could protest he was off again, exchanging a joke with a man

collecting money outside a shop. He was suffering in a Father

Christmas

suit, his face nearly as red as the coat.

'But Doctor,' she said when she finally caught up with him. 'I don't

know how to make a Christmas cake.'

'Neither do I,' he answered, with a wide grin. 'Which is why I have a

recipe.'

He produced a sheet of paper.

'Ingredients,' he announced and tore the sheet in half. 'You get these. I'll

find the rest and meet you back at the TARDIS.'

Sarah Jane looked at the list in her hand and had a suspicion she'd

drawn the short straw. It seemed to be made up of the more mundane

and breakable parts of baking. She opened her mouth to protest, but the

Doctor was already far down the street, impervious to the heat, scarf and

coat flowing around him.

She sighed; she was going to need shops.

She found them eventually between the pastel buildings, with their

patterns of chevrons, sunbursts and lightning flashes. The supermarket

was packed with Christmas shoppers dangerous with laden trolleys and

she had to weave carefully amongst them. She noticed there was an air

of tension about them that seemed to have causes other than the press of

people and the pressures of the season.

She passed by the freezer cabinets and noticed women head first in

their depths, rummaging furiously and casting suspicious looks at other

shoppers doing the same.

Standing at last in one of the long checkouts with a wire basket heavy

with flour and sugar, she listened to the conversations all around her.

'I don't understand it,' a whining voice began from somewhere behind

her in the line. 'We produce millions of tons of turkey meat every year, plus

the wild ones. Why aren't there any in the shops?'

There was a good deal of muttering in agreement from the other

shoppers.

'Of course I'm not worried,' she continued. 'My husband shot three wild

ones on a farm last month and I've got them tucked away in the freezer.'

The atmosphere around her dropped to the temperature of her freezer.

'I'm thinking of doing a macadamia nut stuffing this year,' the woman

with the freezer largesse announced, dramatically reducing her chances of

seeing old age.

'Well, I don't know what I'm going to do,' came another voice. 'We

always have turkey. With kumera and veggies and... '

'You'll just have to find something else this year,' another snapped. 'Like

the rest of us!'

There was a deep resentful silence. Sarah Jane turned to the lady behind

her and asked softly: 'Is there a problem?'

'Where have you been the last few days?' the woman asked in

astonishment. 'There's not a turkey to be had for love nor money. Rumour

has it whole flocks have been lifted, millions of 'em.'

'That's odd,' Sarah Jane said in surprise.

'Someone must be making money out of them, but it isn't around

here.'

The Tannoy sounded at that moment. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we have received

a consignment *of* turkeys. They are available on *a first-come first-served* basis at the rear ofthe *store. If you* would...'

Whatever else the announcer was saying was lost in the melee that

followed. Sarah Jane found herself swept along with the press of humanity

away to the back for *the* shop.

She tried to escape, but the crush of people carried her through the

store, down the aisles and into the warehouse beyond. A chain of white-

coated shop workers were unloading a lorry. The scrum intensified, sharp

elbows dug into her sides and she found herself being jostled and pushed

hard up against the people in front of her.

Air was being squeezed from her lungs and her protests totally ignored

as more struggled to be at the front The mass of humanity pressed harder

and harder against her and she was afraid she'd fall and be trampled.

Small and sometimes savage wars were being fought over turkeys, the

battles so intense that at first the noise - like the ripping of a thick linen

sheet - went unnoticed. Then the roof was gone and sky appeared above

them, a splash of bright blue, and turkeys began to disappear, popping

silently out of the hands of the victorious.

'No!' someone shouted. 'That's not fair!'

There was a chorus of agreement that stopped suddenly, as shoppers,

workers and Sarah Jane Smith quickly followed the turkeys into the sky.

The Doctor's pockets were rapidly filling up with packets of dried fruit,

glace cherries, nuts and a slab of marzipan. He'd just taken possession of

a mince pie sold in aid of the rugby club when he felt the vibrations.

If they had known, the oysters in the Foveaux Strait may have been proud

to find that as a result some evolutionary hiccup they shared a neural

ganglion with the Time Lords.

'A ship!' the Doctor thought to himself. 'But what ship and why here?'

Curiosity piqued, he turned in the direction of the vibrations. They grew

stronger and stronger as he walked between the pastel art deco buildings

until he came to the store Sarah Jane had entered earlier.

As he came through the doors the vibrations ceased and there was a

curious silence through the whole shop.

A young woman clutching a trolley stumbled towards him.

'Gone,' she whispered, her face ashen. 'All gone.'

He swiftly made his way to the rear of the shop and looked up at the

gaping hole where the warehouse roof had been. The sunshine streamed

down, but there was no sign of a ship. He turned away, but as he did he saw

something. Bending down he picked up a familiar, discarded winter coat

'Where are we?'

All around her, people were asking the same question. They were on

a spaceship, that much Sarah Jane was sure of. She could feel the steady

throb of engines through the plating under her feet and the odd variation

in gravity, but she wasn't sure if it was worth trying to convince those

around her.

At first she thought they were in some sort of cell. As her eyes became

accustomed to the light, she took in the triangular room and the floor that

sloped down to one end. Ignoring the wild speculation all around her,

she began a careful exploration of the room. The floor was covered with a

great many feathers and other evidence of previous occupants. Piled high

against one wall were the turkeys, plucked and oven-ready.

She couldn't find any doors in the walls and had a feeling that banging

on the walls - a popular activity amongst her fellow prisoners - wasn't

going to find one. Overhead the light level suddenly changed and she felt

the hairs on the back of her neck rise as if an invisible hand had run a

finger up her spine.

Behind her someone shouted 'Look out!' and she jumped back just in

time to avoid the rapid passing of a large turkey from the heap. It rolled

over and over as the same invisible hand pulled it down the slope to the

end of the room and Sarah Jane saw a section of the floor had rolled back.

Briefly the turkey's outstretched legs caught on the sides of the hole before

it disappeared from view.

'What t h e - ? '

People jumped out of the way as four more birds followed the first down

into the blackness. Sarah Jane cautiously approached the opening, holding

on to the walls as best she could. From somewhere deep below, the smell

of roasting turkey rose, filling her nose and making her mouth water. The

memories of Christmas mornings came rushing back to her; the thrill of

wrapping paper giving way under her fingers, the blue flames dancing

round a blazing pudding and the resin scent of the tree.

'No!' someone behind her was shouting. This is my turkey! No one else

is having it.'

She turned to see a woman clutching a frozen bird to her chest as the invisible force began to drag it towards the opening.

'Let it go!' Sarah Jane shouted.

'No! This is my turkey and I'm keeping it.'

Her heels scraped across the floor as she and the turkey were pulled closer and closer to the dark gap.

'You... aren't... having... my... turkey!' she panted, gripping each drum stick. 'Oops!'

Her foot slipped on a small pile of feathers and she stumbled forward.

The turkey continued its journey down the hole and, still hanging tightly to both legs, the woman followed it head first.

In the silence that followed, two more turkeys went down the hole, but no one felt inclined to stop them.

From far below the smell of cooking changed slightly.

'Oh my god,' Sarah Jane said in horror. 'They're not just cooking turkeys. We're all meat!'

There was a distant gurgling sound followed by a deep mooing groan of pleasure.

'What was that?' a frightened voiced begged.

The silence that followed went on and on.

'That was a mistake,' someone stated without conviction. 'They must be *the* ones who've been taking all the turkeys. Now that lady has... they'll realise they've made a mistake.'

There was a great deal of general support for this idea.

'Maybe,' Sarah Jane said with a confidence she wasn't necessarily feeling.

'I'm sure someone will be looking for me. He's very... oh! Oh no!'

She again felt the sensation of fingers down her spine and the invisible hand seemed to brush against her and move on over to the others who tried to pin themselves against the walls.

The remaining turkeys lay undisturbed, but suddenly a man grabbed at

the person beside him in panic.

'No!' he screamed as the force separated him and began pulling him closer and closer to the opening. He clawed at *the* decking plates, but slowly and surely he inched further and further towards the long drop.

Sarah Jane rushed to his aid.

'Help me!' she shouted, as she tried to hang on to him.

A couple of men came and tried to stop the inevitable descent through the gap, but their combined strength couldn't prevent the inevitable.

They all stood in horrified silence as his last desperate cry faded away.

No one moved or said a word, until a small sob broke from someone.

'It's Christmas. Things like this can't happen at Christmas.'

Sarah Jane shook herself.

'That's right,' she said. They can't. Come on. Grab those trolleys and the rest of those birds! If the gap is blocked, we can't go down it.'

The Doctor considered the alien ship in geostationary orbit on the TARDIS's scanner. It was big, bulky and built for comfort not speed. A

quick scan had shown only defensive weaponry.

'Hazoodians!' he mused. 'Nomadic, bovinoid, opposable hoof and

usually vegetarian. What could they possibly want with Sarah Jane... or

turkeys?'

He turned to the controls.

The TARDIS materialised in a quiet corridor, the proportions of which

were wider than humanity would have found comfortable. The atmosphere

suggested a homeworld where the oxygen levels were higher than Earth.

The Doctor allowed himself to become accustomed to the change and then

began to investigate.

A wide door led into a large, open space the size of a tennis court, and

the Doctor's feet sunk into soft, springy turf of a delicate lime green hue.

The verdant theme extended to the bulkheads, which were hung with

leafy vines. Everywhere, cascades of fat, fleshy blooms alternated with

pendulous fruits in shades of purple, red and orange. In the middle of the

room was a tub large enough to bathe in, surrounded by piles and piles of

round vegetables arranged on low tables.

Picking one up, he caught the strong aroma of turnip or possibly mangel

wurzel. It was very pungent, but under it he detected something else,

something at odds with a vegetarian diet. The smell of cooking meat

was

very strong.

Scenting like a hungry hound, he made his way across the turf, the

odour leading him down broad, sloping corridors deeper and deeper into

the ship. As he got closer to the working heart of the vessel, the steady

hum of the engines filled the air. But under the noise of the engines there

were other sounds: a gurgling and a bubbling and the steady drip, drip of

liquid falling slowly and steadily. It was coming from the same place as

the smell.

Ahead of him a door opened and a large, bulky shape emerged.

'Get that sample up to the skipper,' a lowing voice ordered from behind

the door. 'Tell him I've cracked it this time.'

The Doctor pressed himself against the bulkhead but the figure never

turned around, retreating up a slope with a steady clip-clop. Once it was

out of sight he cautiously slipped through the door.

The cooking smell was very powerful and the heat intense. A multitude

of dials and lights blinked and winked on the sides of a huge metal vat

from which a dark brown liquid dripped continuously down a pipe into a

wide basin.

'Who are you?'

The Doctor found himself face to face with the owner of the lowing voice, a towering creature that looked like a gorilla crossed with an Aberdeen Angus. It was holding a mug in one hoof.

'I'm the Doctor. Who are you?'

'I'm the chief brewer. Does the skipper know you're here?'

'I haven't introduced myself yet,' the Doctor admitted. 'What are you brewing?'

The Hazoodian seemed about to question the lack of introduction, but his role as chief taster - an important part of the brewing process - was clouding his intellectual powers. 'I'm brewing Gathering Ale,' he replied proudly. 'It's at a very critical stage. I shouldn't be bothered by visitors.'

'Ale?' the Doctor asked, taking a critical look at the shining vat behind him 'What's in it?'

'A bit of this and a bit of that,' the brewer said defensively. 'Why?'

'I'm interested.'

'Are you a spy from another ship?' the Hazoodian demanded. His horns, which had been drooping towards his shoulders, rose up pointing in the Doctor's direction.

'No, no. I'm just fascinated by recipes.'

'Everyone's jealous 'cos I'm the best brewer in *the* fleet.'

He took a step forward and *the* Doctor braced himself, but the brewer swayed slightly and for a second his eyes seemed unfocused, then he put a

large and heavy hoof on the Doctor's shoulder.

'There's a secret ingredient,' he said, breathing meaty fumes. He thrust

the mug towards the Doctor. 'You just taste this,' he ordered, a catch in his

voice. 'Best I've ever done.'

The Doctor shook his head. The Hazoodian took a big gulp himself.

'Knew poultry wasn't the whole answer,' he said with a burp. 'Just

needed a bit of something else.'

'I thought your people didn't eat meat,' the Doctor said.

'We don't!' the Hazdooian protested. 'Can't eat meat, it does terrible

things to your stomachs and makes your cud vile!'

'But there's meat in that,' the Doctor said pointing to the tankard.

The Hazdoonian shook his horns.

'We're vegetarians,' he replied. 'No red meat, only chicken and fish. And

only in a brew.'

He burped again,

'I mean, you can't relax on fermented fruit and grains can you? Stands to

reason you need a bit of protein to get really happy.'

He looked lovingly at his vats.

'I got it just about right with those big birds,' he said. 'Some would have

said it needed fish, but not me. I knew there was something it needed... '

Again he shook his horns.

'But who'd have guessed it was ape!'

'Ape?' the Doctor exclaimed.

'Yep! They look a bit like you, but their plumbing's different.'

'You can tell?'

'Of course I can tell, I've not been gathering for brewing all these years

without being able to spot genetic divers... .diversy... diversillity when I

see it.'

He burped again.

'Excuse me... anyway, I wasn't even gathering them on purpose,' he

continued. 'Picked up a batch with the last load of birds and one got in the

pot by mistake. I was going to fish it out...'

The Doctor started forward, frowning heavily.

'But do you know,' the Hazoodian continued, oblivious, 'it's made all

the difference. I've just added another one and now it's even better!'

He again thrust his mug at the Doctor who put up his hands.

'I'd better not share, I've got a cold and I might give it to you.'

'That's really nice of you,' the brewer said, turning to a storeroom behind

him. 'I'll get you another mug, you can't be too careful with germs.'

There was a loud noise as a firm push from behind sent the brewer

crashing to the floor. He opened his eyes, then shut them again. A faint

snore drifted up from his mouth. The Doctor turned his attention to the

brewing pot.

In the next few minutes, the numbers on several dials rose and others

fell. A few seconds later, lights began to flash out some very urgent messages.

He was just making the last adjustments when the main door opened again and another Hazoodian stood there.

'Where's the brewer?' he lowed.

'He stepped out for a second or two.'

'Um... the skipper wants another sample brought to him in the mess. A big one this time.'

'Then why don't you take one - and me - to your leader?'

His Hazoodian guide gave him a suspicious look. He picked up an enormous jar and filled it with the brown liquid. Then he led the way up the slopes to the higher decks where the corridors were all decorated with the vines, flowers and fruits the Doctor had seen earlier.

'It's Gathering Time,' the guide explained, seeing his interest.

He kicked open a door. Beyond it, the Doctor saw half a dozen Hazoodians seated at a table passing round a basin. There was a thump of horns as each in turn sank his nose deep into its depths and drank; long blue tongues sweeping liquid from their wide nostrils as their heads came back up.

'You've got a visitor, skipper,' the guide said. 'And here's the new lot.'

He emptied the entire contents of the jar into the basin.

The Hazoodian Captain had horns that stretched well beyond the

limits

of his enormous shoulders. He made an unsteady attempt to rise to his feet, then thought better of it.

'Welcome, stranger,' he said with immense dignity. 'Welcome to our Gathering celebrations. Have a drink.'

'Yesh,' slurred the Hazoodian next to him. 'Season of peace and joining together and... something.'

With this he quietly slipped under the table.

'Very young,' the Captain remarked, 'hasn't got the horns for it.'

'Captain, I hate to interrupt your celebrations,' the Doctor began. 'But we have a bit of a problem.'

'Do we? What with?'

'With your Gathering Brew,' the Doctor replied.

'Doesn't taste like a problem to me,' one of the others remarked. This was greeted by bellows of laughter and another pass of the flowing bowl.

'I think our brew master has really cracked it this time.'

The Captain took another deep swig from the bowl.

'Cracked it,' another Hazoodian agreed as his head sank to the table and

his eyes drooped closed.

'Unfortunately he's "cracked it" using sentient beings,' the Doctor said, firmly. 'It's got to stop!'

The Captain stared at him.

'Sentient beings?' he said, in astonishment. 'Those birds are thinkers?

I'd never have guessed.'

'Not the turkeys.'

The Captain looked puzzled.

'You mean those ape things he put in by mistake? The ones that made this wonderful brew?'

He gazed lovingly at the bowl, took another long slurping gulp and noticed it was nearly empty again.

'Steward!' he yelled. 'More brew!'

He lowered his head to finish off the remains.

'Sure you won't try?' he asked the Doctor.

'Very sure!'

'I'd never have taken those apes for thinkers either,' the Captain continued, after he'd drained the bowl. He seemed to have an attack of conscience. 'But I'll take your word for it. I'll make sure we don't catch any more apes after we've used the lot we've got in the hold.'

'That's g o o d , but you can't use the ones you've got either.'

'Can't we?'

'No!'

'You know, I'd like to help you out here,' the Captain replied, 'season of good intentions and all that, but I'd be letting down a lot of people and ruining their Gathering Time. Every herd needs a little drink at this time of year.'

These are intelligent beings, Captain!' the Doctor snapped. 'And one of

them is a friend of mine. I want them returned to Earth right now.'

The Captain considered this for a while,

'Can't be done I'm afraid,' he said, eventually. ' If it was down to me, you

could have them, but my hooves are tied.' He relaxed back into his chair.

'I tell you what, I'll separate out your one and we'll keep the rest. Sit down

and relax. Have a drink.'

'I won't let you to kill these people, Captain,' the Doctor warned.

The steward appeared and refilled the bowl.

'And just how are you going to stop me?' the Hazoodian asked, drawing

it towards him.

'I wouldn't drink that if I were you,' the Doctor said, in an icy voice.

The Hazoodian paused. 'Why not?'

'Because I changed the temperature parameters on the brewing vat

before I came to see you,' he replied. 'I've sent them into variable flux and

the resulting differences have made it a breeding ground for bacteria. That

bowl is enough to kill a whole fleet! There'll be no brew at all this year.'

The Captain rose to his feet, the great horns which had been resting

gently on the width of his shoulders came up and forward, leaving the

Doctor in no doubt how this particular species had fought its way to the

top of the food chain.

'You've done what?' he bellowed.

The Doctor grinned.

'It's nothing I can't sort out,' he promised, reassuringly, 'Have a jelly b...

on second thoughts, make that a glace cherry, and we'll talk about it.'

With the aid of two shopping trolleys, Sarah Jane and her fellow prisoners

had covered the gap in the floor. There's been some debate about how to

hold them down, but as no one had been prepared to volunteer as ballast,

they'd piled all the turkeys on top instead.

A pooling of resources had produced little in the way of weaponry, but

they were prepared to make a last stand with an assortment of car keys,

blunt penknives and the odd nail file.

Given something to do, the feeling of despair had lessened and someone

started humming 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas'. Sarah Jane

decided that if anyone swapped it for 'Nearer My God to Thee', she'd

personally rip the turkeys o f f and send the offender down to join the pot

Fortunately, someone started on 'The Holly and The Ivy' instead, then

adjudicated over the number of lords a-leaping versus pipers *piping* before

steering them safely through 'O Little Town of Bethlehem'. But morale

began to fade after 'Good King Wenceslas' and the tired shoppers fell into

silence.

Even Sarah Jane's faith in the Doctor was beginning to waver, when the

sudden draft of cool air flooding down caught her by surprise. She looked

up as the Doctor's head appeared through a hatchway in the ceiling.

He doffed his hat to the upturned faces below and said: 'Merry

Christmas, everyone!'

'Doctor!' Sarah Jane exclaimed joyfully. 'I knew you'd come!'

'I had to come. You've got the flour and we've got a cake to bake,' he

replied. 'But first we need to get everyone home.'

A ramp descended into the hold.

'Do you think anyone would mind if we just...' a woman turned and

pointed to the pile of turkeys.

The Doctor shook his head and ushered them up. One by one, the

shoppers made their way through the open doors of the TARDIS, every one

cradling an oven-ready bird in their arms.

'Their friends are going to be amazed,' he remarked to Sarah Jane.

'About the spaceship?'

'No, that they managed to find a turkey this Christmas.'

Christmas Island is a small territory of Australia located in the Indian Ocean. It supports about 1,600 residents. The island first appears on a map produced by Pieter Goos and published in 1666.

Indian Ocean 1814

No Room

Rebecca Levene

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor, with Chris

Chris was poised to cut open the final coconut when the ship hove into

view over the horizon. He put down the machete and concentrated on

watching it, in the distant hope that it might actually sail anywhere near

them.

Beside him, the Doctor was sleeping beneath his hat, only his chin

exposed to a severe shaft of light from *the* midday sun. If he stayed that

way very long, he was going to get burnt, but Chris didn't bother to wake

him. It was, after all, entirely his fault that they were stuck here.

Remarkably, the ship was still approaching. Chris could make out its

masts now, three of them, and the fine white spread of canvas that was

driving it before the wind. Then, just when he was beginning to hope, it

stopped. He sighed.

The Doctor sat up beside him, shading his eye to peer at the ship. 'Ah.

There she is at last.'

'She's not coming any closer,' Chris pointed out.

'Draws too much water. Too many reefs around here. Nasty things.

They'll send a jolly boat.'

The Doctor was right. Chris could see it now, ten white-suited men

pulling at its oars as it drew closer. He supposed they did look rather

cheerful, with blue bands on their straw hats and ribbons sewn into the

seams of their trousers.

Nearer still, and he saw that there was a passenger, a big-boned, fair-

haired man with a face so red even the tropical sun couldn't bleach it to

blankness. When the boat was playing in the breakers, he hopped out with

surprising agility and strode through the surf towards them.

The Doctor stood up and doffed his hat as Chris scrambled to his feet

beside him.

'Good day, gentlemen,' the man said. 'You are in want of a ship, I

collect.'

In the annals of the bleeding obvious, this scored pretty high, but

the Doctor grinned delightedly. 'Oh yes, indeed. Ours met with a rather

unlucky accident.'

Chris snorted, and the Doctor trod heavily on his toe as he moved

forward to shake the man's hand. 'You'll be the Captain of that lovely

vessel, I imagine.'

The man bowed his head, and Chris saw that his fair hair was caught at

the back in a tight bunch. 'I have that honour. And may I ask your name,

sir? And the name of the craft that had the great misfortune to leave you

stranded here?'

'I'm the Doctor, and this is my - my loblolly boy, Cwej.'

Chris glared at him. 'Your what?'

'Please forgive him,' the Doctor said to the Captain. 'He's foreign.'

'And your ship?' the Captain asked.

'The Tardis.'

The other man frowned, an expression which sat uncomfortably on his cheerful face. 'I fear I'm unfamiliar with her. Was she an Indiaman?'

'A Gallifreyan,' the Doctor said, and skipped through the waves to hop into the jolly boat before the Captain could ask him anything further.

Chris sat at the back of the boat as they approached the ship. The sea had looked calm from the shore, almost peaceful but - rather like the Doctor - it was restless and powerful and always in motion, no matter how still it seemed. The last coconut he'd eaten was in severe danger of paying a return visit

The Doctor didn't seem bothered at all. He sat in the front and stared at the ship, eyes raking her elegant lines and the neat black-and-white checked paint along her sides. He was grinning when he turned back to the Captain, hand clasped to his head to keep his hat in place. 'She's a beauty!'

The Captain's answering grin was even broader. 'Ain't she! Weatherly too, and there's no better sailor on a bowline.'

The Doctor looked as if he understood this gibberish, although it was

always hard to tell. Chris didn't understand a word of it He'd felt more

at home on alien planets. The past was always so disconcerting, full of

people who looked like people, and who you fully expected to behave like

people. But instead they generally behaved like a pack of bloody lunatics.

When they reached the ship's hull, the sailors aboard lowered some kind

of chair to lift them up. Chris would have felt insulted if he hadn't been so

grateful. The thought of having to climb the slick, wet sides of the ship as

she tossed in the swell had been terrifying him for the last ten minutes.

The Doctor sat in the chair beside him, smiling beatifically. 'The grand

old age of sail,' he said. 'Wonderful, isn't it?'

Chris looked out over the endless ocean, their island a spec of green and

yellow in the blue. 'Why are we here, Doctor? And when is here?'

The Doctor kept his eyes on the far horizon. 'Christmas Day, 1814. The

Equator. We're in the last months of the Napoleonic Wars, and Britannia's

about to rule the waves.'

Their chair reached the apex of its climb and swung round, presenting

them with a sudden panoramic view across the deck of the ship. Chris

marvelled at how crowded it was, a hundred men in a space barely 30 feet

wide and four times as long. They seemed caught like flies in a baffling

spider's web of ropes, some on the deck and others high above it, dangling

from the three mismatched masts.

For a moment the sailors were a homogenous mass of humanity,

most in the same loose duck trousers and smocks. Then the individual

faces became clear, smiling from the rigging or frowning down as they

holystoned the boards. There were fair-haired men of the north, ebony-

skinned Africans, stocky South Sea Islanders and, scattered throughout

the rest, ten or more green-skinned lizard men.

Chris raised both his eyebrows and looked at the Doctor.

'And that,' the Doctor said, 'is why we're here.'

Chris clicked his fingers. 'That star - the falling star!'

'Was their ship burning up in the atmosphere, yes.'

'And we're here to rescue them.'

The Doctor smiled as their chair tipped and lowered. 'Of course.'

Chris sighed. 'But we couldn't just have materialised on board, because

that would have been too easy.'

'This is a man-of-war,' the Doctor said as their chair finally reached the

deck, and Chris noticed for the first time that some of the men, the red-

suited ones, had rifles slung over their shoulders. 'Bit of a risk we'd be

shot the instant we stepped out of the TARDIS, and I always like to avoid

that if I can. Besides, who wouldn't want to spend a few lazy days on a

beautiful desert island?'

He scurried off before Chris could point out that he would, at least, have

liked to have been given the option. 'Hang on a second,' Chris yelled after

him. 'Did you say Christmas?'

Chris discovered that being the Doctor's 'loblolly boy' meant he was

required to wait on him at dinner, which was a lot less rude but a lot more

annoying than it had sounded.

They ate in a place they called the gunroom, the officers' mess. It was a

dark-beamed, crowded cabin, with a ceiling so low Chris had to bend his

head to fit beneath it. Since he was expected to stand behind the Doctor's

chair for the duration of the meal, he quickly developed an agonising crick

and a hair-trigger temper.

The meal was huge. When the whole roast ducks arrived, Chris assumed

they were the main course, but he quickly realised they were merely the

appetizer. Half a pig followed, accompanied by large segments of a lamb

and several dead birds. The Doctor managed to appear to be eating, but

Chris wasn't sure he'd actually consumed anything. The Captain, on the

other hand, devoured the food with an almost frightening enthusiasm.

Chris divided his attention between the Captain's vulture-like attack

on

the pig's carcass and the being standing behind him. It wasn't a species

he recognised. Close to, he could see that the scales were very fine and of

a variegated colour that shaded from blue through green and into orange

on its cheeks and hands. It had an upright crest of clear skin on its head

and a double line of gills running down its neck. It was wearing the duck

trousers and frock of *the* common sailors.

The Doctor was watching him too, but when he smiled at the creature it

gazed blankly back, only the nictitating membrane on its eye flicking.

They're a fascinating people, sure,' said a short, pale man opposite

who'd been introduced as the ship's surgeon.

'Absolutely,' the Doctor said. 'I've never seen anything quite like them.'

'Our newest crew members?' the Captain asked from the head of the

table.

The Doctor nodded. 'Where did you find them?'

'Found the poor devils shipwrecked like yourself,' the Captain said, 'and

pressed them into service. I feared we'd picked up another useless parcel

of lubbers, but I couldn't have been more mistaken. They're right seamen,

the lot of them - though their gunnery leaves something to be desired.

Isn't that right, Esssar?'

The lizard man shifted on his broad, webbed f e e t 'It ain't the blasted

gun crews what's the problem, sir, it's them scrubs what's supposed to be

cleaning the shot!'

The Captain shook his head. 'Now now, only a bad workman blames

his, er... shot. Though one can't expect Melanesians to master long brass

nines right from the off.'

'Melanesians?' muttered Chris.

'Melanesians,' said the Doctor. 'How extraordinary. What brings you so

for from home, Esssar?'

Scales glinted in candlelight as the lizard man's face twisted into a snarl.

'It was that infernal bugger our king, pardon my French. He was killing all

the youngsters, which myself and my mates found very disagreeable.'

'I should imagine so,' the Doctor murmured. 'And which island in

particular was he the king of?'

'Which I don't know the English name, do I?' Esssar said, expressionless

once again, and Chris saw the Doctor realise that this was as much as he

was going to get.

'As a man of science like myself, would you be fascinated by their

physiology at all?' the surgeon asked.

'It's certainly... atypical,' the Doctor said.

The surgeon nodded, pinched face suddenly looking passionately alive.

'The tendency of island populations to display unique morphological

features is astonishing! One has only to think of Australia, the Galapagos...

I am convinced, entirely convinced, that a new scientific theory is required

to explain this.'

'I'm sure you're right,' the Doctor said, beaming at him as if he was a

star pupil.

'Why, only last week,' the surgeon said, pale cheeks reddened with

excitement, 'one of Esssar's people was injured in an action against the

French frigate *Anomie. A* grave cranial depression I was quite convinced

would be fatal. I was very much looking forward to dissecting his pancreas,

but he made a full recovery, the creature.'

'Oh,' said the Doctor. 'How disappointing.'

After Christmas dinner, the Doctor did what he must have been intending

to do all along.

'I've got,' he said, 'a problem, and I think your Melanesians might be

able to help.'

On the deck beside him, the Captain gave him a cautious, appraising

look, and Chris instantly adjusted his estimation of the man's IQ several

points upward. He knew he was about to be played.

'We are a King's ship, sir,' he said. 'Cruising for the crown.'

The Doctor shrugged. 'Oh, no need to worry then. It was very valuable,

and very near, but... if you're busy...'

His voice was pitched loud enough for the entire crew to hear. Chris saw

tendons strain in scores of necks struggling not to look up.

'A prize?' the Captain asked.

'The spoils of one. Stored in a convenient - and waterproof - blue box.

But I left it on a sandbank.'

'And then acted all surprised when the tide came in,' Chris said darkly.

'Did it, indeed?' the Captain said. 'Well, it has been known to do so from

time to time.'

The Doctor frowned at Chris, then shrugged sheepishly at the Captain.

'The box is lost beneath the waves until the next spring tide. But perhaps

your Melanesians... '

'They've a remarkable facility for breathing underwater, sure,' the ship's

surgeon said. His thin face was carefully bland, but Chris thought he'd

begun to suspect the Doctor too.

The Doctor beamed. 'Do they? Then maybe they could dive for my box.

That would be wonderful.'

The sailors were silent, breath collectively held, but in the background

a hencoop full of chickens clucked beside a braying goat The Captain

looked at the Doctor for a very long moment before nodding.

There were twelve of the lizard people on board. At their Captain's nod,

they congregated round the Doctor as he gave them a detailed description

ofthe TARDIS, nictitating membranes flicking across their eyes while he

talked. Only Esssar replied, and Chris wondered if the others even spoke

English.

But they seemed to understand what was wanted of them. The capstan,

which apparently was usually used for raising the anchor, was rejigged with

remarkable efficiency and enormous quantities of rope into something

that could raise a TARDIS from deep, underwater sand.

Esssar hooked a loop of rope around his waist and nodded at the Doctor.

'I ain't making any promises,' he said.

'I'm sure you'll do your best,' the Doctor said. 'That's all I can ask.' He

reached out and shook Esssar's hand enthusiastically, and Chris saw a

brief flash of silver as something passed between them.

It was the TARDIS key, Chris was sure of it

'Are you crazy?' he hissed to the Doctor. 'And leave us stranded here?'

As slick as dolphins, the lizard men dived beneath the waves.

The Doctor stepped back and folded his arms. 'I've left them a note on

the console with instructions, asking them to come and pick us up.'

'Which they're bound to do,' Chris said. 'Rather than, you know, just

stealing it.'

But after ten minutes, something neither of them had anticipated happened.

There was a tugging on the rope attached to the capstan, and the sailors

on deck began to haul the big wheel round in time to the beating drum of

a man in a red uniform so thick he looked like he might literally boil alive

inside it.

'It seems they've found your treasure,' the Captain said, and Chris

sensed the vibration of excitement from everyone around.

The TARDIS and Esssar surfaced at the same time, both bobbing on

the gentle swell. A second later, eleven other crests broke the surface and

there was a rough cheer from the rigging. The Doctor let out a little huff

of mingled surprise and annoyance.

'Maybe,' said Chris, 'they don't actually want rescuing.'

'Maybe,' the Doctor said irritably, 'you should help them,' and pushed

him forward to join the line of men hauling the blue box aboard.

It lay on its side on the dripping deck, the most welcome sight in the

universe.

'Very difficult job,' Esssar said, and pressed something into the

Doctor's hand which could only be the TARDIS key. After that, there

was an expectant silence as everyone looked at the TARDIS, then at the

Doctor.

'Do you not wish to check the contents?' the Captain asked.

The surgeon was watching them, black-eyed and interested, and the

Doctor's mouth pursed sourly. He moved very, very slowly to fit his key in

the lock.

It took a moment for Chris to realise that the groan behind him was a

sound of pain and not frustration. The Doctor paused and peered, bird-

like, over his shoulder. 'Ah,' he said. 'I see.'

Esssar had collapsed to the deck, curled into a foetal ball. The other

lizard men stood in a loose ring around him. Chris couldn't read their

faces, blank beneath their scales, but he thought he understood their body

language. They were worried, but not alarmed. They'd been expecting

this.

'Let me to him!' the surgeon said. He tried to push through the ring to

get at the fallen Esssar, but the lizard people held him back with steely

strength.

'I ain't in need of your bleeding help, am I?' Esssar hissed. But when the

Doctor walked calmly forward and doffed his hat, they let him through.

Chris hesitated, then swiftly followed. They both dropped to their knees

beside the fallen lizard man.

'It's early, isn't it?' the Doctor said gently. He eased Esssar onto his back,

pulling on his arms until they uncurled from around his abdomen.

'Five days,' Esssar said. His accent had changed, suddenly neutral and

cultured, and Chris realised that in his pain he must be speaking his own

language, translated for them by the TARDIS.

'Doctor,' Chris said, 'what's the matter with him?'

The Doctor was working, quickly and efficiently, to strip Esssar of his

clothes. 'Nothing,' he said. 'Nothing at all.'

The round bulge of the lizard man's stomach had been hidden by the

loose frock and duck trousers. Naked it protruded like a scaly melon. A

scaly, writhing melon.

'Oh,' Chris said. 'Oh.'

'We crashed,' Esssar said. 'Into the ocean of this world, but my people

must birth on dry land, beneath the sun.'

'And this was the nearest you could find,' the Doctor said, as the lizard

woman let out a cry of pain, back arching from the deck.

'We tried the shore,' she said. 'They feared us. One died at the first

landing, three at the next. And then we found the sailors...'

The Doctor nodded, stroking a hand across her brow. 'Who didn't care

what you looked like, as long as you could haul on a rope.'

Esssar cried out in pain again, and the bulge moved.

'Time to push,' the Doctor told her softly.

There was yelling from all around - and above, where the sailors in the

rigging had the only clear view of what was going on below. Chris thought

he recognised the Captain's voice, and the surgeon's, ordering the lizard

people to stand aside, but they refused to move, webbed feet suctioned to

the wood beneath.

Chris could see the child's head now, crowning between Esssar's legs.

It was a milky, luminescent colour, like mother of pearl, ridged with the

beginnings of its crest

'A girl,' one of the surrounding creatures said, and Esssar hissed a sound

of acknowledgement

The head was tearing her, her scales flaking as it pushed and pushed to

get out. Esssar yelled again and Chris saw the Doctor whisper something

in her ear, a look of profound compassion on his face. He realised with

a sick shock that her life was in real danger. That here, on this primitive

world, the mere act of creating life could also take it

'Only a little longer,' the Doctor crooned. 'Your daughter's almost here.

Just one more push.'

Her hand clawed into the deck, chitinous brown nails shaving the wood

in long, pale flakes. In the distance, the goat brayed a counterpoint to her

sobs.

On a moment of impulse, Chris took her fingers in his. Her scales were

warmer than he'd expected, and softer, but her grip was like a vice. He

yelped in pain but didn't let go.

There was blood on the boards below her now, scarlet and steaming.

She screamed once - a high, horrible sound that seemed to echo from

the water all around. And then, in a slither of mucus and blood, her child

came out of her.

The Doctor caught it, cradling the form between his hands. She looked

tiny and so delicate, organs pulsing beneath near-transparent skin. Chris

didn't understand how something so small could cause so much pain.

Esssar's hand dropped Chris's, and for a horrified moment he thought

she was gone. But she was just reaching out to take her child. She stared at

the baby in silence for so long that Chris began to wonder if there might be

something wrong with it. Maybe they weren't meant to be transparent. But

then Esssar dropped her head to nuzzle her daughter, and her nictitating

membrane shielded the fierce emotion behind her eyes.

The Doctor's lids shuttered his own eyes for a moment, then he looked

round the ring of lizard people. 'And who's the happy father?'

Esssar swiped the mucus from her baby's head with a long, green

tongue, then shook her head at him. 'Which there ain't no father, is there?

Parthenogenesis don't need one.'

Then the ring parted, and for the first time the Captain and the rest of

the crew could see what had happened.

'He gave birth?' the surgeon said. 'Here?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'There wasn't any room at the inn.'

Christmas is one of the four most important festivals of the Vietnamese year, the others being the birthday of Buddha, the New Year and the mid-autumn festival.

Vietnam 1969

Interesting Times

Eddie Robson

An adventure ofthe Third Doctor, with Sarah Jane

Up on the third floor, nothing was happening. Ail the exits were being guarded by

men who did not move. Anybody not guarding an exit was sleeping, or lying still in

their rooms. They contemplated the silence. Nobody thought about the war - most of

them had forgotten about it.

This was how they had come to like it.

The stairwell on the east side of the building was being watched by a photojournalist

named Martin Jackson. In his room lay strips of film, where he had unspooled his

unprocessed pictures from the past few days and exposed them to the sunlight. Now

he sat out in the corridor in an easy chair, wearing one of the hotels monogrammed

dressing gowns, and had a rifle across his lap. He stared at the door, which had

remained closed for the past three hours.

There was a sound. That was bad enough, but it didn't seem to be going away. A

babble of noise from the other side of the door. Growing louder.

Nervously, Jackson stood up. He opened the door a crack and the sound came in.

Finally he could make out what it was: a voice relating the details of a serious crime that had occurred today. It made him break out in a sweat: he quelled the trembling

in his fingers by tightening his grip on his rifle.

The noise was getting louder. He couldn't see where it was coming ***from.*** *Somewhere in the stairwell. His panic increasing, he raised the rifle and loosed a couple of shots, then started to reload. But the noise refused to go away: in fact, Jackson heard the*

whine of a loudhailer being switched on and the noise was fed through it. Sobbing,

Jackson finished reloading the rifle but couldn't focus enough to lift it. It fell to the floor, as did he. He looked up as the door opened a couple of feet from his face and

through it stepped a tall white-haired man and a young woman. The woman held

the radio and the loudhailer, which sent its output reverberating through the corridor at shattering volume.

Earlier that day

Sarah Jane Smith returned from the TARDIS wardrobe to find the Doctor

still trying to justify why they hadn't landed at UNIT HQ as planned. His

latest theory: grit in the helmic regulator. He had donned white gloves

and removed the regulator from the TARDIS console to clean it In his

green smoking jacket and green silk shirt, he looked rather like an overly

flamboyant snooker referee.

'Can't possibly be expected to pilot her with any kind of accuracy unless

this is locked down...' the Doctor muttered, ostensibly to himself but

obviously loud enough for her to hear. 'No wonder we drifted... '

'Honestly, I don't care,' his young companion said, laughing.

The Doctor popped the regulator back into the console, removed

his gloves and rubbed the back of his neck. 'Well, yes. Where have you

been?'

'Dressing for the weather,' Sarah replied. A glance at the scanner

confirmed that the rain outside hadn't eased off any whilst she'd been

away, getting changed into a short-sleeved blouse, light khaki trousers,

walking boots and a waterproof mac. 'Where are we exactly? Did you work

it out?'

'Saigon,' said the Doctor.

Sarah's eyes widened. 'Really?'

The Doctor nodded. 'It's the dry season, believe it or not. And we're out

a few years. It's 1969.'

Sarah's eyes widened further. She turned and walked out of the TARDIS

at quite some speed. Then she ran back inside, picked up her camera from

where it was hanging on the hat-stand, and ran out again.

It looked remarkably like France - if somebody had changed the climate

over France. A provincial tourist town. The TARDIS had landed in the

middle of a tree-lined square; umbrellas hurried from one side to the

other, presumably carried by people. The constant white noise of the rain

drowned out the voice of the city.

'Are you wondering where the war is?' the Doctor asked. He had emerged

from the TARDIS and his sole concession to the weather was a dark green

umbrella, obviously selected to match his jacket. He stretched out his arm

and pointed a finger. 'It's a fair old distance that way.'

Sarah gave him a withering look. 'I know that. It's just, I don't know... it

seems very... peaceful, actually.'

'Well, as a matter of fact, hostilities have been suspended. It's Christmas

Eve. Late afternoon.' He stepped to stand next to her and handed her

some money. 'Here. Some local currency for you. You rushed out here

remarkably eagerly.'

'Oh, well it was reading the reports from out here that made me want

to be a journalist. The most amazing people, writing the most amazing

things and taking the most amazing pictures... '

'You could meet them.'

Sarah nodded. 'I could. As long as they haven't gone home for Christmas.

But I'm sure some of them will still be around.'

'It's up to you. Personally, I'm hungry.' He turned and rattled the TARDIS

door to check it was locked. When he turned back, Sarah had already set

off. She called out to him, but he didn't clearly hear what she said because

of the rain: something about when she'd meet him back at the TARDIS.

She seemed excited, though, so he didn't want to hold her up. He watched

her walk out of sight around the corner, then he wandered in the direction

of a little cafe he knew, which he hoped existed at this time.

Sarah found somewhere that was dry enough to open up the map she'd

bought. She hadn't been able to find one that listed local hotels, but she'd

been able to establish what district she was in and she was fairly sure that

she was close to where she wanted to be. Someone would be able to

tell

her.

'Excuse me,' she said to a passer-by, hardly noticing that she was

speaking Vietnamese. 'Could you show me where the Continental Palace

Hotel is on this map please?'

The Doctor took a seat and, being almost the only person in the cafe, was

served almost immediately. He ordered a bowl of mi Qu ng, recalling that it

was particularly good here, and some tea. Then he picked up a discarded

local newspaper.

When his waiter returned, the Doctor first thanked him in Vietnamese

- bypassing the TARDIS translation system: he happened to speak the

language well and could make better use of its subtleties this way - and

said that the food smelt delicious. Then he asked about a story he had read

in the newspaper.

'Did you hear about this?' he said, pointing to the story. Three houses

near the river had been totally destroyed, causing five deaths. There was

a picture.

'What?' said the waiter, peering at it. 'Oh. Yes.'

'It says here that it was caused by a storm. Do you believe that?'

The waiter shook his head. 'Nothing else was damaged. Just those

houses. Even the person who wrote that won't believe it.'

'So what do you think happened?'

'Some people say they saw something land on them - crash into them, in

fact. Looked like a plane. People say the Americans were testing some kind

of experimental new plane and it went wrong. They don't want anybody

else to know.' The waiter shrugged. 'That's what they say, anyway. Makes

sense to me.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Yes, it would. Thank you.'

The waiter nodded and left. The Doctor curled a couple of noodles

around his chopsticks and wondered what credentials he might be able

to claim that would convince the Americans to tell him what had really

happened.

Halfway through his meal he came up with an idea. He'd have to stop

back at the TARDIS and pick some things up, but he thought it would

work.

The Continental Palace was an ornate, four-storey affair, doing its best to

live up to its name. It was much as Sarah had imagined it when she'd read

about the newsmen who had stationed themselves here, filing their stories

over the telephones in their rooms before going downstairs for dinner and

drinks on the balcony. She was sure some of them would still be here,

in

spite of Christmas and the ceasefire. These were the kind of people who

couldn't be torn away from their war. If she went in there, she was sure

she'd find them arguing issues, ethics, Nixon and Kissinger. She'd have to

bite her tongue about Nixon, of course. She couldn't give anything away,

to them of all people.

As Sarah neared the entrance, she realised that a cordon and a small

American military presence was blocking her way. She wondered whether

this was normal. She strode over to one of the two jeeps, inside which

were seated two soldiers - one black, the other white. She adopted a

businesslike manner and asked the black soldier - his uniform stated his

name was Holland - what was happening.

Holland was staring at a radio playing Christmas carols. He looked up at

her and replied, 'You should stay back, miss.'

'But I'm supposed to be meeting some friends in there for dinner. I'm a

journalist.' She flashed her NUJ card.

Holland looked interested. 'You know people in there? Who?'

'Um... Seymour Hersh? Peter Arnett? Martha Gellhorn?' she said,

plucking names from her memory and hoping she was hitting at least one

who was actually stationed here at this time. 'Charles Stanford...?'

'Stanford's up there,' said another soldier who was listening in on

the conversation, and didn't look like he could possibly be older than

nineteen.

'That's good,' said Holland. 'Maybe you can help. If we can get through,

maybe you could talk to him.'

'Ah,' said Sarah. 'Well, I don't actually know him as such. I'm new out

here you see, I'm writing a piece for Metropolitan magazine and the AP

fellows I spoke to before I set out said to come down and make myself

known.'

Sarah's back-pedalling didn't seem to dissuade Holland as much as she'd

hoped. 'We'll try his room again.' He turned to his comrade. 'Okay?'

The other soldier nodded and started dialling an emergency telephone.

Cables trailed away from it, to where they had presumably been piggy-

backed onto the network.

'Sorry, but what's going on?' asked Sarah.

'They've sealed o f f the whole third floor and some of the second,' said

Holland.

'Who has?'

'We're not sure. But according to the. staff, some of the guests are

involved. First got reported when maid service tried to go up there and got

chased away. Next time anybody tried to go up there, somebody came after

them with a gun. The stairways and elevators are all guarded.'

'By who? The guests?'

'So far as we can tell. Our best guess -'

'I'm not getting any response,' the other soldier said, putting down the telephone.

'Okay,' said Holland, then turned back to Sarah. 'Our best guess is some kind of collective breakdown. Most of the guys up there are reporters, so they've seen stuff... y'know, they might not have been prepared for.'

'But all of them?' said Sarah. 'At once?'

Holland shrugged. 'We've been out here six hours. No clue what they want or if they've got hostages or anything. Just waiting.'

'Just waiting?'

'Uh-huh. We're on a ceasefire and I don't intend to spoil any of these boys' families' Christmases by telling them to go in there waving guns around. Those guys up there must want something, so we're going to wait for them to tell us what it is. If what they want is to stay up there - they can't stay up there for ever.' Holland looked down and made a slight adjustment to the tuning of his radio. 'You're English, right?' he asked.

Sarah nodded.

Holland pointed to his radio. 'BBC World Service.'

'What is it, Carols From King's?' asked Sarah.

'Yeah. Well, it's last year's repeated. The live service is about two a.m.,'

said Holland. 'I like it better than all that pop Christmas music. Makes you

feel peaceful.'

Suddenly a voice came over his walkie-talkie. 'Holland, we got one

isolated - he's running your way!'

Holland didn't even stop to reply. He dropped the radio, pulled a gun

from a holster and swept out of the jeep, past Sarah and into a position

covering the door. At the same time he exhorted all the other soldiers in

the area to do the same. Sarah quickly lowered her umbrella and hopped

into the back of the jeep, which gave her some cover whilst also allowing

her to keep watching the door through the rear window.

For a few seconds, all that could be heard was the drumming of a tropical

shower and the sound of choristers in a Cambridge college singing 'I *saw*

three ships come sailing in...'

The doors of the Continental Palace slammed open and out rushed a

dark-haired man in his 30s, wearing a white shirt, black trousers and no

shoes or socks. He stopped when he realised that he was surrounded by

five armed men - but not for long, making a ridiculous attempt to dodge

past them. Once *the* solders realised that the man wasn't armed, they

wasted no time in restraining him. They marched him to the jeep

which

Sarah was sitting in and Holland gestured for her to get out so that they

could put him in the back seat Holland tried to convince him to calm

down, but the man still insisted on trying to get away, so the soldiers

resorted to handcuffing him to the jeep's body.

Holland turned to Sarah. 'Do you know this guy?'

Sarah took a proper look at his face, and realised that although she

didn't know the man, she did recognise him. Sarah had recently read

a well-researched book by him about Operation Menu - a book which

he had yet to write, or even consider writing. He'd looked a lot more

distinguished, and a lot less twitchy and panicky, on his dust-jacket photo.

This is Charles Stanford,' she told Holland.

'Mr Stanford,' Holland said, 'can you explain to us -'

Stanford suddenly lapsed into a panic attack, first trying to leap from

the jeep but finding himself prevented from doing do. Then he pushed

himself against the back seat of the jeep, finally sinking down to bury his

face in one corner and cover his ears.

'Mr Stanford?' said Holland. 'Mr Stanford -'

'Shh!' said Sarah.

'Excuse me, miss -'

'Look at him. He's trying not to hear something. So let's just be quiet

and try to work out what it is. Maybe it's you.'

This made sense to everybody. They all kept quiet and kept watching

Stanford; Stanford kept his face buried and his ears covered. Just like

before Stanford had emerged, all they could hear was the rain and...

The radio. But the radio was different. At the moment Stanford had

displayed his bizarre reaction, the carol service had ended and a news

bulletin had started. Sarah looked at the radio, then at Stanford. Then she

reached over and switched the radio off. Stanford's breathing slowed and

he returned to a normal seated position.

'What?' Holland said.

Colonel Glenn was surprised to hear that a man with a British accent

had arrived at the compound in a taxi and asked to see the crashed alien

spacecraft that his men had retrieved from near the river yesterday. He was

even more surprised to discover that the man had been let in and allowed

to do precisely that.

'Who is this guy?' asked Glenn, not unreasonably, as he strode through

the corridor alongside Captain Blake.

'Says his name is Doctor John Smith,' Blake replied. 'Scientific adviser to

some department of the UN.'

'So? What's his business here?'

'He says he's got experience of this type of thing. Suggested we check

his credentials with a guy called Irving Newton.'

Glenn stopped. 'New Mexico Irving Newton?'

Blake nodded.

'And did you check with him?'

'Well, we don't exactly have his number on file.'

'So why did you let this Smith guy in?'

'He had some... uh... documents that pretty convincingly suggested that, you know, he was there.'

'He's not trying to blackmail us, is he?'

'No, sir. He was clear on that. He says he just wants to help.'

Glenn and Blake turned and stepped through into a garage. In the centre of the room stood a large, light green egg shape, half covered with a tarpaulin. To one side stood Lieutenant Wise, drinking coffee with a tall white-haired man. Frosty the Snowman was playing on the radio.

'Dr Smith?' Glenn asked.

The man smiled and extended the hand that wasn't holding his coffee.

'Just Doctor, usually. You must be Major Glenn.'

'Colonel,' Wise corrected him.

'Oh yes. Right,' the Doctor said.

'If it's okay, sir,' said Blake, 'I should check in with the team over at the Continental.'

Glenn nodded. Blake left, then Glenn turned back to the Doctor. 'I understand you wanted to take a look at the... the, er...'

'The alien spacecraft?' The Doctor reached out an arm and patted the egg. 'Yes. In fact, to be precise, I wanted to and I have.'

'It's your opinion that it's definitely a craft? Not just some piece of

debris?'

'Oh yes.'

'Who told you it was here?'

'Nobody, old chap. I saw the picture in the newspaper of where it

landed. Not only could that pattern of damage not have been caused by

any weather conditions, it also couldn't have been caused by any aircraft

you've got. The angle it must've hit would've been very sharp,' he said,

demonstrating with hand gestures, 'but it evidently cushioned its own

landing so the damage was limited to the immediate impact'

Glenn nodded. 'And who have you told?'

'Again, nobody. I assure you, I'm the soul of discretion. What's rather

more of a concern is whether you've located the occupant.'

'Are you serious?' asked Glenn.

'Absolutely. Lieutenant Wise here tells me you've been unable to open

the craft until now?'

'That's correct.'

The Doctor reached out and massaged the egg. His hand gently slipped

beneath its surface. His brow furrowed. 'Hold on, the mechanism's a bit

on the recalcitrant side...' Something inside the egg went clunk. 'There!'

The top of the egg peeled back to reveal the craft's interior. Glenn looked

on in amazement. Wise had already seen it, but was still impressed second

time around.

The Doctor produced a pointer from his pocket, extended it and used it

to gesture around the inside. 'This is where the occupant would sit - so,

either this was intended for use only in emergencies, or they're not terribly

concerned with comfort. Instruments to both sides, with an interface

similar to the one I used to open the roof. This panel here may have

sustained some damage as it seems to be totally inoperative. The power

source is in the base. Storage to the rear - including a food supply, emptied

out.' He slid the pointer back into its compact form. 'But as I say, the most

significant thing is what isn't here. The occupant There's no body, so

presumably it survived at least long enough to get out and away from the

crash site.' The Doctor tapped his lip. 'I wonder why it got out?'

'Do you think its intentions are hostile?' asked Glenn.

'It's possible. But let's not make assumptions.'

'So what are we looking for?' asked Wise.

'No idea. I can only offer guesswork at this stage, I'm afraid. But the

occupant can't have been that large. Might well be injured and needing to

recuperate... I suspect it's in hiding.'

'Where do we start?' asked Glenn.

The door opened and Blake returned. 'Sir? Strange developments at the

Continental.'

The Doctor grinned. 'That sounds as good a place as any, doesn't it?'

Sarah was leaning on the steering wheel of the jeep, writing in her

notebook whilst the World Service played an episode of I'm Sorry I'll Read

That Again. Stanford, still seated in the back, appeared not to object to this

and had remained largely calm since his previous episode. Sarah glanced

in the jeep's rear-view mirror and saw that he now had his eyes closed,

apparently listening to the rain.

'Excuse me, but aren't you the famous Sarah Jane Smith?' asked a voice

right in her ear. She managed not to jump too much, and turned to see the

Doctor standing next to the jeep, under his umbrella.

'What are you doing here?' she asked crossly, putting her notebook

away. She glanced just past the Doctor and saw Holland filling a superior

officer in on the situation.

'Oh, I was just pottering about and I happened to discover that the US

military had retrieved a crashed UFO from the general vicinity.'

'Oh. Of course. I should have guessed.'

'It sounds like you've been having a rather unusual time as well.

Something to do with this chap?' The Doctor pointed at Stanford, who

failed to respond. 'Hello, old fellow!' the Doctor said to him.

'Did they tell you about the top floor of the hotel being seized by the

guests?'

'They did, yes. And this chap came out, is that right?' The Doctor

gently shook Stanford by the shoulder, getting him to open his eyes. Still,

though, Stanford looked blankly at what was ahead of him.

'Yes,' said Sarah. 'His name's Charles Stanford.'

'Oh yes,' said *the* Doctor, fumbling in his pocket and bringing out a

torch. 'I read his book. I had a few spare minutes waiting for the Brigadier

to meet me for lunch and I found it lying around. It'll be superseded,

obviously, but he got his facts straight and he has a nice direct style.' He

shone the torch into Stanford's eyes. 'So you did get to meet a celebrity.'

'Well, yes. After a fashion. It'd be nice if I could actually talk to him

about his work rather than just sit here whilst he rocks catatonically back

and forth, but it's better than nothing I suppose.'

The Doctor continued his examination. 'He's a bright fellow then... not

somebody whose eyes you could easily pull the wool over...' He switched

off the torch and took Stanford's pulse.

The oddest part was that a news bulletin came on the radio and he went

into a blind panic. He almost looked like he was trying to dig his way

through the bottom of the car.'

'Hm,' said the Doctor. 'Yes, he shouldn't be like this. This isn't a normal human state. He's under the influence of something else, something -'

'Alien?' asked Sarah.

'Just so, Sarah Jane. Just so. I think our lines of enquiry converge very neatly at this juncture.'

'Excuse me,' said one of the soldiers who had arrived with the Doctor, steeping over to the jeep.

'Oh, I'm terribly sorry,' said the Doctor. 'Sarah Jane Smith, this is...' He made a show of having to think about the next part. 'Colonel Glenn?'

Glenn nodded.

'Pleased to meet you,' Sarah said.

'What can I do for you, old chap?' asked the Doctor.

'I was just wondering if we're allowed to get involved in this at any point,' said Glenn.

'Would you like to?' said the Doctor, pretending to be oblivious to the Colonel's mild sarcasm. Sarah thought this was rather an unfair contest

- after all, the Doctor had years of experience winding up the Brigadier.

Glenn was a total novice.

'I'd like to get to the bottom of this situation so we can all rest easy on Christmas Day, yeah.'

'Well, I've got good news for you. I think Sarah has found you a rather effective weapon.'

'Have I' asked Sarah, not particularly liking how that sounded.

Twenty minutes later, up on the third floor, Sarah looked down at the

poor man who had been guarding the door. He seemed in such pain. They

should get this over and done with. 'What are we looking for, Doctor?' she

shouted over the noise of the amplified radio.

'I've no idea what it looks like, Sarah,' said the Doctor. 'But I'm pretty

sure it's hiding up here somewhere. These people have been resisting any

outsiders coming up here. I think they've been conditioned to protect it'

The two of them moved forwards, looking into the rooms. In those

rooms that were occupied, the occupant could generally be found hiding

in the corner, the wardrobe or under the bed. Sarah noted that every room

had a radio built into the wall by the side of the bed, and that in each room

it had been smashed with a fire-axe.

After searching four rooms they heard something unwelcome on the

radio: 'And that is the end ofthe news.'

The Doctor and Sarah looked at each other in alarm as the programme

gave way to music. Above its amplified sound they could hear stirring from

the rooms.

'Quickly Sarah, find another station!' said the Doctor. 'Anything

broadcasting news. In English, ideally.'

Sarah twisted the tuning dial, finding more music, speech in Vietnamese,

more music. The guests started to emerge. Some of them were armed.

Recovering their focus, they marched towards the Doctor and Sarah.

'Come on, Sarah!'

'I'm trying, I'm trying!' she shouted. Guns were being levelled at them;

they took steps backwards.

Then, an American accent spoke out over the radio: 'Pope Paul IV has

expressed his hopes for a peaceful Christmas following the bombings in

Milan and Rome earlier this month...'

The approaching guests dropped their weapons in order to clap their

hands over their ears and fell aside, allowing the Doctor and Sarah to pass.

And for the first time in her life, Sarah gave thanks to the Pope.

The Doctor and Sarah eventually found what they were looking for in room

310, a room whose floor was covered in strips of ruined camera film. As

part of another routine search, the Doctor pulled the wardrobe door open

and revealed a round, cowering shape, covered in fur. It looked to Sarah

like a large dandelion clock, apart from a number of white appendages

which she presumed were limbs. It convulsed violently, and the Doctor

told Sarah to turn off the radio, close the bedroom door and lock it. There

was nobody else in here; they were alone with the creature. The Doctor

crouched down and began to talk to it

'Hello, old chap,' he said. 'Don't be alarmed - we won't hurt you.'

The creature seemed to believe him, but it was hard for Sarah to make

out exactly what it was saying. Its words came through to her as English,

but they didn't seem to make sense. It was agitated, saying things about

how time - or perhaps history - was cutting into it, and it was hurting?

Something like that.

'I'm not really getting this, Doctor,' she murmured after a couple of

minutes.

'It's a fascinating creature,' he said. 'When outside its home environment

it's almost uniquely physically sensitive to the ebb and flow of history. Any

event with any level of historical impact is like feedback screaming in its

ears.'

'So what's it doing outside its home environment then?'

'Usually, its ship has defences which screen it out and keep the creature

protected, but they failed - so it had to quickly land in a time and place

where history was quiet.'

Sarah's brow furrowed. 'Vietnam?'

'In the middle of the Christmas ceasefire,' the Doctor pointed out. 'A

sort of historical non-event - notable for what didn't happen rather than

what did. It was an emergency landing, the best it could do. But it knew

that the fighting would start again soon, so it had to get to safety and

protect itself until it was rescued. It hid up here and broadcast its own

neurosis to the guests.'

Sarah nodded. 'A fear of news. Right. I get it now.'

They didn't even know it was here. All they knew was that they didn't

want anybody bringing the outside world in.'

'Can you help it?'

'Easily. I just need to get it to the TARDIS, and -'

The handle of the door rattled behind them, and they turned to look.

Martin Jackson tried the door of his room, but found it locked. He took his key from

his pocket, unlocked the door and entered.

Inside he found the two intruders, the man and the young woman. He raised his

rifle, unsure which of them to cover first. Logically the man, but it had been the

woman who'd had the radio... which was lying on the bed. They were unarmed.

The woman edged towards the radio, but Jackson just shook his head and pointed

the rifle at her.

'Now, take it easy old chap,' said the man. 'There's really nothing to worry about.

In fact, we're going to sort out your problem for you. That fear you're

feeling - we're going to take it away. But we need you to lower that rifle.'

The man took a step forward, and Jackson moved the rifle to cover him instead. He

wasn't sure how he was going to do this - the intruders were inching further apart,

making it harder for him to cover them both.

Then he stopped thinking about that, because he'd seen what was in between them,

in his wardrobe. The white,furry creature. It didn't take him long to realise that

it resembled no Earthly animal whatsoever. It made strange noises, its appendages

quivered. Jackson was looking at the news story of the century, and right now that

was the very last thing he wanted to be looking at.

Jackson swung the rifle to point at the creature and gave it both barrels, ignoring

the two intruders as they shouted 'No!' in stereo.

A minute later, the woman was crying, the man was ashen-faced, and the creature

was dead. And Jackson was totally unable to account for why he had killed it.

Slammer. At bedtime, children put a shoe in the window hoping one will leave a gift.

In Iceland there are said to be 13 naughty Yuletide Lads. Each is named after a prank he is fond of playing, such as Sausage Snatcher and Door

Iceland 5017

Revellers of Doom

Matthew Griffiths

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Evelyn

Bob stumbled over the rocks into the cave and smiled. At last, he could see

the light. There couldn't be much further to go now. His breathing and his

clothes were equally ragged, but he steadied himself and looked ahead.

The light was almost on top of him - and he could practically touch the

tinsel. He stumbled forwards, his arms reaching out.

Suddenly there was a grinding, shuddering sound and the light shot

away from him. Bob gaped.

Then he realised the floor had disappeared too and he was pitching

forward into rocky darkness. Still, he smiled as he blacked out, it was

better than spending Christmas at home.

'I thought you said this was Iceland?' huffed Dr Evelyn Smythe, taking off

her heavy winter coat and throwing it inside the TARDIS. 'I'm baking!'

A voice emerged from the time-space machine behind her. 'Hmm? Oh,

we're probably just close to a geyser, I'd imagine.' The Doctor joined her

in the cave, still wearing his ridiculous coat in spite of the heat. He locked

the door then produced a torch from his pocket and switched it on. 'We

shouldn't be too far from the surface.' He smiled his infuriating little smile

and strode confidently off.

Moving as carefully as she could, Evelyn followed. By the time she

caught up with him, the Doctor had rounded a corner and was playing the

torch's beam over the rock. This cavern was much larger than the one they

had just left, Evelyn realised. The Doctor switched the torch off.

'What did you do that for?'

'Look,' he said, pointing a light on the far side. 'I'll wager that's the

surface.'

Evelyn put her glasses on. 'Are you sure?'

'Well shall we take a closer look?' The Doctor flicked the torch back on

and set off across the cavern.

'Can't you go a little more slowly?' Evelyn said. 'I don't want to break my

neck slipping on all this debris.'

'Debris?' The Doctor squatted and picked up a loose rock. 'You're right.

Seems as though this cavern was cleared quite recently.' He held out the

rock for Evelyn to inspect. 'Look. Explosives residue.'

'If you say so.'

From somewhere nearby there was a groan. Evelyn grabbed the Doctor's

shoulder. He shone the torchlight around until it found a low, lumpy shape

on the floor.

'It's a man,' hissed Evelyn.

As they got nearer, she could see that the prone figure was dressed in charred clothes. His hair and his beard were matted and his blistered hands were outstretched towards the light in the far wall.

'Help me,' said the Doctor, and between them they manoeuvred the man into the recovery position. His eyes twitched open.

'Nick?' he asked.

'Ah - no, I'm afraid not,' said the Doctor.

'Who's Nick?' said Evelyn.

'Nick!' The man seemed to smile. 'He's a saint! He's only promised us the coolest Christmas party.' Then his head flopped. Evelyn bit her lip. With a great deal of effort, the man raised his head again. 'Ever,' he hissed through broken teeth. He dropped to the floor again.

The Doctor put two fingers to his neck.

'Is he...?' asked Evelyn.

'There's still a pulse.' The Doctor handed her the torch and gently patted the unconscious man up and down. 'No broken bones either, and no serious wounds as far as I can tell. He might be dehydrated, though.'

He glanced up at the speck of light 'He seemed to be heading for that light as well. Let's see if we can find some water out there.' He hoisted the man's arm over his shoulder, helping him to his feet, and they made their stumbling way across the cavern.

It was tough going, but they made it When they had, Evelyn could see

that the light was not daylight but an opening in the cave wall that led into a clean, white tunnel. A big bunch of tinsel hung on each wall, with longer strings looping away ahead. A discreet, gold-lettered sign pointed down the tunnel and read: 'Guests this way, please.' It was all really rather tasteful for something so tacky, she thought

'That's odd,' said the Doctor. Still supporting the man with one hand, he took a slack bit of tinsel with the other. 'Feel that' He passed it to Evelyn.

'It's quite tough,' she said. 'Like wire.'

'Strange,' the Doctor nodded. He looked down the tunnel. 'I think we should investigate.'

They followed the passage gently downwards, further underground. Evelyn noted that the tunnel seemed to widen at various stages and there were fine horizontal grooves in the wall, but the pleasant decor meant that these were not very obvious.

The Doctor's patient mumbled: 'It's that noise again.' His eyes slowly focused and he blinked in the light 'Blimey! I made id' Then he caught sight of his new companions. 'Sorry. Name's Bob. Merry Christmas.'

Evelyn could hear a noise as well, a distant grinding, shuddering sound.

But it was getting closer. 'You've heard that before?' she asked.

'Yeah,' he said. 'When...'

'May I suggest we continue this conversation when we've reached

safety?' said the Doctor.

Bob and Evelyn looked at him, then back up the tunnel in the direction

he was pointing. The stretch they had just walked down was telescoping

closed towards them and the caves were a growing circle of darkness

beyond that, threatening to engulf them. There was a metallic rustling as

the tinsel looped itself together neatly.

'In other words,' cried the Doctor. 'Run!'

They needed no further encouragement. Although Bob could hobble at

quite some speed, neither he nor Evelyn could keep up with the Doctor,

who disappeared around a corner ahead of them. Bob followed, Evelyn

bringing up the rear. But before she could get her bearings, she stumbled

over the lip of an open bulkhead and fell to the floor on the other side.

It took her a few minutes to get her breath back. When she had done so,

she realised the noise had stopped. They were safe.

'Well give me a hand, won't you?' she said. But there was no answer.

Getting shakily to her feet, she looked round and saw that a heavy door

had closed behind her. She put a hand out to steady herself, feeling the

smoothness of the wall. No grooves; so this one wasn't likely to telescope

up on her like before. That gave her a little more confidence as she set

off

in search of her companions.

As she stumbled along, she could hear a cacophony of voices coming

from up ahead. A welcome gust of cool, conditioned air blew across her

face and she emerged onto a gallery. She looked down over the balcony at

a vast cavern where long queues of people were making their way towards

a huge crystalline dome, webbed with white piping. Through its frosted

glass, she could make out tiny figures milling around inside - and were

those Christmas trees? Seasonal music spilled out from the entrances to

the structure, which were guarded by what looked like tollbooths.

But not everyone was making it into the dome. Some were getting turned

back. They were being rounded up by figures dressed in green and led off

into passages in the rockface. Evelyn forced herself to concentrate. Despite

the throngs of people, the Doctor should be easy to spot. She put her

glasses on. Wasn't that him? No, wait, wasn't that him? Then she realised

that a lot of people seemed to be wearing bright, fancy clothes.

'Typical. I suppose they've all come in their party frock coats,' she

muttered. At least, she would have done if a hand hadn't reached out from

behind her, clamped over her mouth and hauled her from the gallery.

The Doctor shuffled along on his tiptoes, trying to peer above the rest of

the queue.

'Evelyn?' he called. 'Evelyn!' But there was such an excited hubbub that

even if she were nearby she wouldn't have heard him.

'I wouldn't worry, mate,' said Bob. 'We can catch up with her inside. Or

at least you can.'

The Doctor frowned. 'I don't understand.'

'Well, chap like you, you're sure to have an invite.'

'You mean you don't?'

Bob sniffed. 'Nah. But what's the worst that can happen? Beats being

topside.' He nodded ahead of them. 'Aye-aye. Helpers.'

A tall man in a green uniform stepped from the doorway of a booth.

'You,' he snapped at Bob. 'Name?'

'Bob. Robert Wintergreen.'

The helper looked down at a clipboard.

'Not on my list. Got an invite?'

'It, er, got burnt?'

The uniformed man ignored him. 'Money for a donation?'

Bob sighed. 'I'm all out.'

The man pointed to a holding area on one side of the walkway. The

Doctor raised an eyebrow.

The man made a mark on his clipboard as Bob moved out of the way and

the queue jostled impatiently. Then he looked up, saw the Doctor's clothes

and beamed. 'Season's greetings, sir! And your name is...?'

'I am known as the Doctor,' said the Doctor.

'Dr...?'

'I'm sorry, I don't really have time for this. I am the Doctor, and no, I

don't have an invite, nor any money for that matter. I'm looking for my

friend. You wouldn't have seen her would you? About this high, wearing a

brown cardigan, glasses on a chain?'

The guard blinked. He looked down at his clipboard and then back at the

Doctor. 'You're not on the list?'

'And what made you think that I would be?'

There were tuts from behind him. 'Get a move on!' came a shout.

'Well, your clothes, sir. And you're not... burnt.'

'Not burnt?'

'Ye-es,' the uniformed man said. 'I'm sorry, would you mind?' He

gestured towards the holding area.

'I think I would mind, actually. Do you have a manager? I'd like to speak

to someone in charge. Ifyou don't mind.'

Someone in the queue began singing 'Why are we wait-ing...?'

'We'll - ah - we'll see what we can do, sir.' The man looked towards the

holding area again. 'But in the mean time if you could...?'

The Doctor raised his hands in a placatory gesture. 'Very well.' He

joined

Bob in the enclosure. 'So what happens now?'

'Do you know what's going on behind the scenes of your party?' Evelyn's

abductor sneered. The untempered light shone down on a roughly hewn

chamber, where Evelyn could see rows of shabbily dressed people packing

boxes, wrapping them and dropping them into chutes set in the wall.

'It's not my party, young lady,' said Evelyn. 'The Doctor and I weren't

even invited.' She stared at the woman in her scruffy overalls, her dark,

dreadlocked hair. She returned Evelyn's gaze sceptically.

'Really? How'd you get here so clean if you're not a partycomer, then?'

'We got lost. If I were a partycomer wouldn't I be at this party by now?'

The woman shrugged. 'S'pose you did leave it a bit late for a walktube.'

She looked Evelyn up and down. 'I'm Libby. Better get you suited up

before any of the helpers see you're not working.'

'Helpers?' asked Evelyn

'Nick's paid goons,' said Libby, taking her along a balcony and down

some stairs.

'I take it that means you and your colleagues are not on salary?'

'We're all the ones without invites,' said Libby darkly. She gestured over

the bannister at all the packers and wrappers. 'Tried to gatecrash the party

and got hived off here.'

'There's an awful lot of you.'

'Yeah,' scowled Libby.

They reached the lower level, and the younger woman took Evelyn to a

recessed chamber off the main floor. Inside there were rows of overalls

hung along one wall. Libby pulled one off a rail. 'Here, put this on,' she

said, passing it to Evelyn.

Reluctantly, Evelyn did as she was told, the fairly sizeable overall fitting

over her skirt and cardie without too much difficulty. Libby rummaged in a

box and produced an elasticated cap to complement the new outfit.

'What's going on here, Ellensdottir?'

The two women looked up to see a man in a red hard hat standing

between them and the noise of the packing room floor.

'Sorry, sir,' said Libby, her manner more subdued, Evelyn noted. 'Just

helping this one find her work party.'

'Well she's not going to find it in here, is she?' He stepped aside.

Evelyn hastily donned her cap and she and Libby hurried back onto the

floor. As they passed the helper, he caught Lobby's arm.

'I've got my eye on you, Ellensdottir,' he said. 'Ifyou want to stay down

here for Christmas, you've got to work. Otherwise, you can just go back

where you came from.'

'That's what you think,' muttered Libby. She chivvied Evelyn past the

conveyor belts to a chute in the corner, nodding to a few of her workmates

as she w e n t Gold-wrapped boxes were dropping from the conveyor into a

messy pile. A table with spools of ribbon and a pair of scissors stood next

to them.

'There you are,' Libby said to Evelyn. 'Today's job. Get knotting.'

'Charming,' said Evelyn. 'Where are you off to?'

'Presents of my own to sort,' she answered. She leaned in closer and

lowered her voice. 'Surprise presents.' She tapped the side of her nose and

disappeared among the wrappers and packers.

The helpers escorted the Doctor, Bob and a group of others into a long, low

room that had been bored from the rock. It was lined with rusty bunks.

'Now,' the helper said, in a voice that suggested this was a speech

he had made many times already that day. 'Nick doesn't take kindly to

gatecrashers. But he's willing to make you all a special offer. Seeing as it's

Christmas. Either you lot can start making your way back home...'

There was a general 'No' from the throng.

'Thought not. It's nice and cool down here, isn't it? Or, you can stay and

do a bit of work for Nick - unpaid mind - but you get to be here for the

whole twelve days of Christmas. And a free pass to the party on the last day.

Yes?' There were one or two nods. 'Good. Someone will come and assign

you to your work teams in a bit.'

As he was about to go, he put a hand on the Doctor's shoulder. 'I'll see

what I can do about getting you a word with the guv, sir,' he murmured.

Bob hauled himself onto a top bunk and grinned. 'This is more like it.'

'I don't see what you've got to be so happy about,' the Doctor chided.

'Well, it's not so bad. Even if we don't get into the party, at least we're

out of the sun.'

'I don't follow.'

'When were you last up there?' Bob pointed towards the ceiling. 'It's

baking. Solar flares, they reckon, or global warming. Said on the news that

this Christmas was going to be the hottest ever. I didn't fancy that. Last

year was bad enough.'

'This place is a kind of shelter, then?'

'It's a party. Nick's party. He promised his guests a really cool Christmas.'

He looked around. 'But Nick wanted it exclusive - voters and donors, that

was the deal. I guess he got a few more gatecrashers than he'd bargained

for.'

'Like you?'

'News got leaked and they started closing the walktubes. I thought if I could find a way through the caves they'd let me in. I guess that's what all these people thought, too. What's your story?'

'Right!' The helper had returned with some colleagues. 'Look sharp you lot. We've got a work rota sorted.' As the green-clad men began to go round the room sorting the gatecrashers into parties, the chief helper came over to the Doctor and coughed politely. 'Excuse me,' he said. 'If you'd like to come with me, sir, I've arranged that meeting with Nick.'

'Thank you, young man,' said the Doctor, grandly. Then he turned to Bob and whispered: 'Can you find Evelyn and keep yourselves safe? I need to see a man about a party.'

Evelyn had always considered herself no mean knotter of ribbons, but the monotony of the task was getting her down. Package after package, all the same size and shape, were wrapped in a bow and whizzed off into the chute in the wall. She tried to see what was going into the boxes, but the packers were out of sight beyond the sealers and the wrappers.

'Budge over.'

Evelyn jumped, then realised it was Libby who had crept up behind her with a heavy sack. 'I need to stash these out of sight.' Evelyn shuffled to one side and Libby heaved the sack under the table.

These are your surprise presents?' Evelyn tutted. 'What is it we're

packing, anyway?'

Libby gestured at the workers at the other end ofthe belt. 'Ifyou want to

see what they're packing, go and look.'

Evelyn went back up the line, watching the whole process in reverse

- the bows being knotted, the wrapping paper being crimped, folded and

stuck to the boxes, the boxes being taped shut, the cellophane-wrapped

presents and foam nuggets going inside - until finally she was at the

far end of the conveyor, next to another chute. From this dropped the

cellophane-wrapped gifts.

The presents looked like respirators, she thought, the kind that might

strap onto someone's face. Only on either side there were two miniature

plastic bottles of champagne. How very odd.

'Quite neat this, I reckon,' said a voice.

'Bob?'

'Evelyn, isn't it? Your mate sent me. He got taken to meet Nick.'

At least the Doctor was safe then, thought Evelyn. Bob picked up a

respirator.

'You said "neat",' Evelyn prompted.

'Yeah, looks your basic high-class oxygen-mix inhaler. But the champagne

bottles are a nice touch.'

'Oxygen-mix?'

Bob tapped one of the miniature bottles. 'Helps you breathe and loosen

up at the same time. Just the way to get a party started.'

'What's wrong with an old-fashioned drink?'

'Good idea,' said Bob. He furtively opened one of the little bottles and

took a swig of air. 'Ah! I needed that. Do you want some?'

Evelyn shook her head. She was wondering what Libby had in her sack.

The Doctor was escorted into the dome, down walkways of light, white

crystal with corridors leading off at surprising but aesthetically pleasing

angles and discreet vents set into the wall. He looked round at the well-

dressed party guests. It certainly felt like the early stages ofa party - there

was polite chit-chat, soft music and the smell of pine needles from one or

two tastefully decorated trees. But the do didn't seem to be in full swing,

not just yet. They were waiting for something.

'How much further before we meet Nick?' the Doctor asked the chief

helper.

The man raised a finger. The music gently segued into the sound of

sleigh bells, and then from the ceiling a mellifluous tenor voice spoke: 'A

very merry Christmas to you all, ladies and gentlemen.' The guests cheered good-

naturedly. Would you please welcome your *friend* and mine, your

host, the leader of the Christmas Party, Mr Nicholas Santana!'

There was applause, polite at first and then rapturous, drowning out the

melody being piped from the ceiling. Slowly coming along the concourse,

flanked by two helpers, was a beefy man in a fine red suit with white trim.

As he approached, the Doctor noticed his mop of dark, curly hair, his

heavy but well-groomed black beard with two silver streaks either side of

his moustache. The man smiled and raised his hands modestly. Thank

you so very much,' he rumbled. It took a good few minutes more for the

applause to subside. T h a n k you.'

The Doctor stepped forward, his hand extended to shake Nick's, but the

chief helper blocked his way. 'If you don't mind, sir,' he hissed. 'Nick has

a speech to make.' The Doctor bristled but bit his tongue.

'My friends,' Nick said, climbing onto a podium at the front of the

concourse. A sweeping gesture encompassed the growing crowd. 'My

dear, dear friends. Welcome one and all. And merry Christmas! I hope

you're enjoying our air conditioning?' There was cheering for another few

moments. 'It's nothing. Just our way of thanking our loyal party members

for all their support - and donations - over the last year. Here's to you!'

He gave a flourish. There was a sound like party poppers, and streamers

showered from the ceiling. Whoops and cheers came from the guests.

'Seeing as you've all been good girls and boys' - laughter - 'you can unwrap one present early!' The ducts in the ceiling opened again, and small packages dropped into the surprised hands of the guests.

Towards the rear of the concourse, one of the partycomers pulled tentatively at the bow on his package. It fell away and he pulled off the wrapping paper as well. Everyone was watching. It was as he started pulling off the tape that the Doctor heard a muffled bleep-bleep.

'Get down!' he yelled.

Kaboom! A shower of smoke from behind them. Then silence. The Doctor looked back to see the concourse littered by wreckage and fallen trees. A hand flailed in the wreckage and fell still.

'Why are you blowing up your own guests?' spluttered the Doctor.

'That,' said Nick at length, a stupefied tone in his voice, 'was not supposed to happen.'

There was a distant rumble, and a cloud of dust billowed out of one of the chutes at the ribboning end of the conveyor.

'What was that?' said Evelyn.

'Search me,' said Bob. They bustled forward into the gathering crowd of packers and wrappers.

'Fellow workers,' Libby called. 'Friends! It's Christmas Eve! We've been giving our unpaid labour for long enough, don't you think? Long enough

to wonder what in hell we're doing it for?' There was a belated murmur

of assent. 'Believe you me,' Libby continued, 'it's not for our benefit.

It's about time our host let us into his precious party.' She brandished a

wrapped package. 'That's why I've got a present for him and his guests!'

The workers looked confused. Clearly realising she had lost them, Libby

tore the paper off the package and revealed the contents. Evelyn popped

her glasses on - then gasped.

'What is it?' whispered Bob, who was too short to see.

'Explosives and a detonator! Oh, and some tinsel, I think.'

'Yeah? Yeah!' smiled Libby above the crowd. 'I replaced the last lot of his

little presents with some of my own.'

She set the detonator and tied a quick bow around the box, then tossed

it into the chute behind her. 'Merry Christmas, Nick!' In the distance, there

was the sound of another explosion.

'You can't do that!' cried Bob.

'You're standing up for Old Nick?' she spat. The crowd seemed to melt

away around Bob.

'N-no.'

'You like him so much, you can go and see him.' Libby nodded at a

couple of her friends and they grabbed Bob's arms. 'Oh, and take him

a

message from me. Tell him I'll keep sending him presents until we get

what we deserve!' Her cronies bundled Bob forwards to the chute edge.

'Free parties for all!' she shouted.

'No!' cried Evelyn. But it was too late - into the chute went Bob, his cries

fading gradually as he fell.

'See to the guests, won't you?' Nick instructed his helpers. They nodded

and began helping the surviving partycomers to their feet The Doctor

followed Nick and his chief helper off the concourse, down a corridor and

through a doorway.

Nick hadn't noticed him yet. 'Someone must have got hold of the

clearing charges,' the party leader was saying. 'I thought you had them

guarded?'

His chief looked sheepish. 'They were, but the helper - well, he'd

booked leave for Christmas. Couldn't get any cover.'

The Doctor edged around the room, looking at the tinsel-strung consoles

that surrounded the circular chamber. Screens showed various schematics

- the complex of tunnels and walktubes, complete with a shadow system

of ducts and vents with their own entrances and exits. Around Party

Central was a double ring of, what, shielding? The Doctor studied the

screens more closely. The ducts and vents led from the dome past a

series

of giant silos and deeper underground. They must be like an enormous

fridge, siphoning off the heat somewhere, he thought. But where?

There was a cough. 'Excuse me,' said Nick.

The Doctor turned. 'Ah! Nick. I've been wanting a word with you.'

'And who are you, exactly?'

'I am usually referred to as the Doctor.'

'Well shouldn't you be out there helping the injured partycomers?' Nick

asked, not unkindly.

'I don't want to miss out on the real party preparations. Looks like you've

got something special cooking here.'

'You mean the snow?'

'Do I?'

'Well, that's what's so special about tonight. On the stroke of midnight,

it will snow. Real snow! For the first time on Earth in living memory.'

Nick frowned. 'I promised my guests the coolest party. Didn't you read

the invite?'

'I wasn't invited.'

'Ah. Well, I assume from your festive attire you're a would-be donor

then? Too discreet to mention it to the boothboys and wanted to have my

ear? I quite understand.'

'I'm glad someone appreciates my dress sense. And I certainly think I

could make a - contribution to your efforts. How exactly are you going

to

make it snow down here?'

'Ah!' said Nick, warming to his theme. 'The air conditioning in Party

Central relies on a liquid agent that is kept at a comfortable temperature

under pressure. Tonight, we lower the pressure in the system, the liquid

cools and *voila!* A white Christmas.'

'And where does all the heat go to?'

Nick tapped the screen next to the Doctor. 'This dome is built close to a

pocket of magma. We simply vent the heat into that.'

'Impressive,' the Doctor nodded. 'But how do you contain the magma?'

'We don't. Once it's snowing in Party Central, the superheated lava will

overflow through the outer ducts into the surrounding chambers.'

'You mean the chambers outside the dome?' asked the Doctor, horrified.

'What about the workers?'

Before Nick could answer, there was a 'Waa-aah!' and a figure shot from

a duct in the ceiling. The man landed on top of the chief helper and they

lay in a tangle of limbs.

'Bob!' cried the Doctor. 'I thought I told you to find Evelyn.'

'She's up there,' Bob gestured towards the chute. 'With the workers.

You've got to stop them. They've gone loopy.'

'Ah well, they had their uses,' said Nick. 'But we don't need them

any longer.' He turned to the controls, flicked a switch and spoke into a microphone. 'Would all partycomers kindly don their breathing apparatus? I'm about to seal the inner vents. Those without apparatus will have to share.' He turned to his helper, 'Man the vaporiser.' The chief helper dusted himself down and complied. There was a clunk and a heavy rumbling sound that seemed to shake the entire structure. On the screen, the Doctor watched the magma rise into the outer ducts.

'It's snow time!'

The packing room shuddered and Libby fell against the chute wall. 'What was that?' she asked. The packers and wrappers had no answer.

Evelyn pushed through the crowd and helped Libby steady herself. 'I hope Bob's all right,' she said sternly.

Libby snorted. Then her nose wrinkled. 'What's that smell?'

'Something sulphurous,' Evelyn said. 'It's coming from one of the chutes.'

They backed against the wall, scanning the openings into the ducts around the packing room.

Libby raised a wavering hand and pointed at the far wall. 'Crikey,' she shouted over the increasing noise. 'It's -' But before she could say any more, there was another almighty rumble and she was shaken from her feet and into the chute behind her.

'All those people have been working for you!' said the Doctor. 'You

vent all

the heat and they'll all die.'

'So?' rumbled Nick. 'Why should I care about gatecrashers? They had

their chance to vote for the Party, but most of them just scoffed at us. They

could have donated if they wanted to. And,' he added icily, 'if you recall,

some of them have just blown up some of my guests.' A light blinked on

the console. 'That's odd.'

'What is it?' asked the chief.

'There's a blockage. It's stopped me sealing the central chute.'

'Good!' said the Doctor.

'Good?' hissed Nick. 'Do you realise what you're saying? The packing

room is the hub where all the ducts and the vents meet. Once it's full of

magma it will backflow down here if I can't seal us in!'

'Well, you'll have to stop the packing room filling up then, won't you?'

The chief coughed. 'It's clear now, guv.'

'Excellent!' said Nick.

With a 'Waa-aah!' and a shower of dust and smoke, another figure shot

from the chute and landed on top of him.

'Who are you?' asked the Doctor.

'Liberta Ellensdottir,' said Libby as she got up. 'Stuck up the chimney!

Now I know how Santa feels.'

'Well, you arrived in the nick of time,' the Doctor said, unable to stop a

smirk. 'A couple of seconds more and that vent would already have been

closed. Which gives me an idea!' He hurried to the chute mouth, flicked a

switch and cleared his throat.

The air in the packing room was getting hotter. Most of the packers and

wrappers had backed away and were struggling to get out. Evelyn was

halfway across the room when she heard the voice.

'Evelyn!' It was coming from behind her. 'Evelyn! Can you hear me?'

Evelyn watched the crowd of workers pushing and shoving to escape.

Fanning herself with her hands, she went back and peered into the chute

that Libby had fallen into.

'Doctor, is that you?'

'Evelyn, I need you to drop Lobby's explosives into the ducts. And

hurry!'

'What?'

'Lobby's surprise presents. I need to destroy the ducting system and

block the magma's route before it gets to you! The charge must be

deployed exactly as I say.'

'Magma?'

'Evelyn, there's very little time.'

She rummaged in Lobby's sack and gingerly took out one of the explosive

packages.

'Set the charge for a 30-second detonation,' the Doctor continued.

'Drop

it into the outer chutes. The explosion will block the lava.'

'But which one?'

There was a pause. She imagined the Doctor considering all the

options.

'You'll need to drop it in -'

There was a terrific clang.

'Doctor? Doctor! Which chute?'

But there was no answer.

Evelyn turned and walked to the centre of the room, looking at the array

of openings around the walls. She took a deep breath, and guessed.

'What did you do that for?' snapped the Doctor.

Nick stood by the duct controls. The clang of the final bulkhead sealing

still resounded in their ears. 'I can't have this party raining fire when I

promised snow!'

'Look!' cried Bob. 'Evelyn's dropped the charge.' He pointed to a screen,

where a coloured dot blinked on and off to show the explosive present

heading into the system.

'It's in the wrong chute!' the Doctor cried. Pushing Nick out of the way,

he began flicking switches and pulling levers. He watched the schematic

as ducts opened and closed, the explosive ricocheting around the system

like a pinball. 'I'd keep your fingers crossed if I were you.'

The control room held its breath.

'Wait,' said the Doctor. 'The coup de grace!' He pressed one more switch

The screen showed a bulkhead flipping into place beneath the explosive

and it bounced clear, straight into the path of the lava flow. It exploded.

Gradually, the tremors subsided.

'Is that it?' asked Bob.

The Doctor stood up and studied the controls. 'I believe it is. The

tunnel's comprehensively blocked. I'll just reverse the vaporiser - and take

the heat out of proceedings.'

'But you've trapped us down here,' said Nick.

'For ever,' added Bob.

'Not at all,' said the Doctor. 'The route to the surface is still clear - we

blocked the lava flow before it got to the outer chambers.' He looked at the

four incredulous faces. 'Well, don't look so miserable! This is supposed to

be a party. Perhaps you should start mingling.'

The others looked awkwardly at one another.

There was a knock on the door. 'Doctor?' came a voice. 'Are you in

there?'

The Doctor went to the door and activated the control. Amid the

partycomers and workers stood Evelyn, wearing breathing apparatus.

The floor was covered in gloop and lacklustre snow dripped from the air

conditioning.

'Typical,' said the Doctor. 'You're promised a white Christmas and all

you get is slush.'

Evelyn produced a sack from behind her. 'Ho, ho, ho,' she hiccupped.

'Nice one,' said Bob. He came over and took a handful of the champagne

bottle respirators from the sack and began passing them round.

The Doctor put a hand on Evelyn's shoulder. 'I think it's time we were

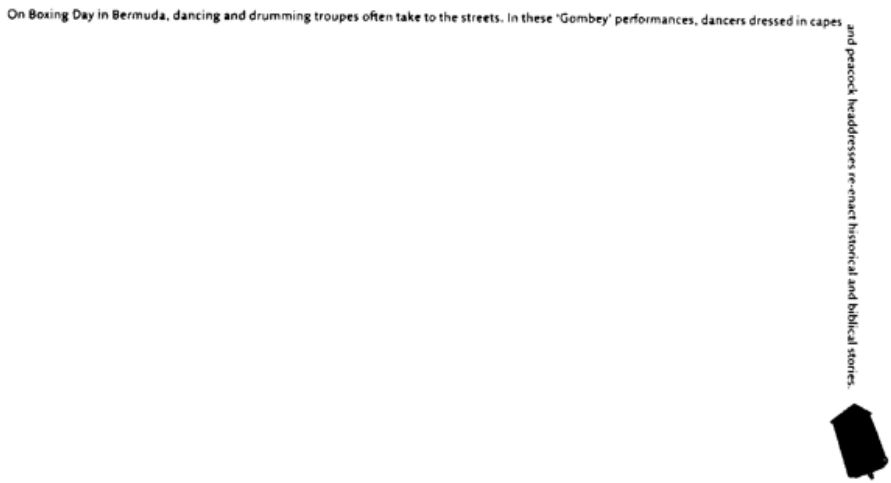
off. I don't really do party politics.'

'What a good idea,' she said, her voice muffled by the breathing

apparatus. 'This thing's making me tipsy.'

They headed off down the concourse, kicking slush out of the way as

they went.


On Boxing Day in Bermuda, dancing and drumming troupes often take to the streets. In these 'Gombey' performances, dancers dressed in capes and peacock headdresses re-enact historical and biblical stories.

Bermuda **Triangle 1952**

Lost and Founded

Andrew Pidoux

An adventure of the Third Doctor, with Jo

'Every day another thingy!' said the tall man who was watching the

TARDIS began to take form. 'What strange thingies on this pieland. What

strange mysteriousnesses. Yesterday, was it only yesterday? I did see a

whole big bunch of munsters creeping down the sure towards little me.

What strangenesses they was. All these strange day-to-days. Then there

was those pesky aliens. What strange peskies they was. I don't believe in

them at all. They is manifestations of the heat.'

The tall man scrambled in a ragged gait down the rocks and secreted

himself behind a slim palm tree. He was very tall and slim with a shaggy

mass of hair, so he believed that the palm tree completely hid him.

'It looks to my eyeballs like an old telephoney boss. I likes the looks of

it, because I daresay it remind me of my wifey. When she used to go out

after an argymit with me, and she used to ask the peaceman to borrow his

boxes. But I mustn't start believing in it. Remember, John, what happened

when you started to believe in that alien. You got all upset over nothings.

That's when you hit yourself on the headbutt. It was fat and green and it

was only another mirage. It disappeared after a while in a wisp of haze.

Then what good was your weapons?'

The tall man continued to watch, shielding his eyes from the sun, as

a middle-aged grey-haired man emerged from the police box. He was

dressed in old-fashioned garb, with a cape that flowed from his ample

shoulders. The tall man chuckled to himself. 'What funnies there is today.

Look at this fellow. What's that he's weaving on his soldiers? I daresay it

remind me of the pust but only slightly. I used to see such peoples in the

pust, but they was rich and not like honest working mens. But they was

all right.' The sight of the visitor had stirred something in the tall man's

memory and a tear formed in his eye, then quickly broke and fell down

through the dirt on his face. 'Don't start being sillies,' he said, turning

away. 'It's just an old mirage, isn't it? Every times they fools you. And today

of all days... '

After a few minutes, Jo emerged from the TARDIS wearing her smallest

bikini, dappled with polka dots.

'Ah...' said the Doctor, not quite sure where to look. 'You know, my dear,

you ought to avail yourself of sun-cream. This is 1952 and you humans

have been busy ruining the atmosphere for the past hundred years. You

could find yourself with more than an attractive tan.'

'Don't worry, Doctor,' said Jo scathingly, as though addressing an

overweening father. She unrolled the pink beach towel she'd been

carrying and out fell a tube of factor 15, as well as a copy of a paperback

called *Love on the Line.* The cover showed a woman tied to a train track, a

p u f f y locomotive steaming towards her and a tall handsome fellow half-

embracing and half-rescuing her, as though he weren't sure which was the

most pressing task.

'Hmm...' said the Doctor, and turned again to face the sea with the air of

one who did not approve. Jo scampered off towards the centre ofthe beach.

The Doctor watched her spread the towel on the undulating sand, plonk

herself down, and then open her book at some pre-marked place. With a

sigh, the Doctor looked down at his feet. If there was anything he hated in

this world more than interplanetary bureaucracy, it was sand. 'One can't

walk on the stuff,' he said to himself. 'It gets into one's shoes, it gets into

one's hair. There ought to be an interplanetary law against sand.'

Nonetheless he struggled over it grudgingly and made his way

towards

the black volcanic rocks that were tumbling haphazardly down at the back

of the beach. Once he'd mounted them, the Doctor felt himself on sturdier

ground.

'That's more like it,' he said under his breath. Quite soon, he attained

a reasonable height and was able to look down and see the figure of Jo

considerably reduced below him. They had materialised in a small bay.

The sea was extremely blue and transparent There were eight or ten palm

trees dotted nonchalantly around, and also a few boulders. He squinted

out to sea, hoping the waves would reveal signs of hidden life. He did

fancy he could see some dark shapes moving over the crystal blue waters

far out. 'Perhaps they're jellied vampires', he thought, looking suddenly

interested. Then he realised that they were only the shadows of a couple of

innocent clouds, fast evaporating in the sky.

The tall man hid himself perfectly behind a different palm tree and

surveyed the beach. The mirage he had seen earlier was still there, much

to his delight, but the strange fellow in the cloak no longer was. However,

just beyond the mirage and lying on a large pink rectangle, there was an

even more interesting sight 'Good griefs, oh my godness,' said the tall

man excitedly. 'Thank you lord for bringing me this mirage today. I forgive

you all the munsters and cannonballs and whatnot This is really a lovely.

It does look an awful lot like my wifely as I remembers her in my dreams.

Only it doesn't have the same colour hair. But it don't matter, God! I don't

mind.' The tall man narrowed his eyes. 'What is it reading? It is reading

a punk-coloured book, but I can't see the tittle. It's looks like the Meals

and Boom books my wifey used to like. That's what she would sometimes

be gandering when we went up to bed, and that meant that she wouldn't

mind if I turned o f f the light..' He closed his eyes and a look of bliss came

over his face.

When he reached the top ofthe rocks, the Doctor was greeted by the sight

of yet more ocean. The island, it seemed, was remarkably small - perhaps

not more than a square mile. He felt the pull-string on his cape digging

into his neck a little in the heat, and one or two beads of sweat were

journeying down the crag of his brow.

At the highest point of the island, the Doctor could see a small grassy

hillock protruding from the volcanic rocks and, growing scrawnily out of

it, a wizened black tree of a genus he didn't recognise. It seemed to have a

sort of lateral foliage that dangled oddly from every branch.

Intrigued, the Doctor scrambled over, with half a mind that he might be

able to discover a new species. Walking over to the tree, he bent down and

looked at the foliage more closely, sniffing it with his detective's nose.

'How strange,' he said to himself. 'Not foliage, but seaweed. Perhaps

some kind of freak tide deposited it here.' Casting his gaze upwards, the

Doctor noticed that on the very top of the tree some sticks had become

lodged in a loose star shape. 'Very odd,' he ruminated, 'that driftwood

should have got caught way up there. And what are the odds that it would

form a perfect pentagram?'

At the base of the tree the Doctor noticed some strange little package-

like things that turned out, when he bent down to examine them, to be

stones wrapped in palm leaves. 'This must surely be a sign of intelligent

life. Perhaps, indeed, alien life,' he said triumphantly. 'There may be some

mystery on these shores after all.'

The tall man was muttering to himself between mouthfuls of octopus and

rainwater. 'So much for today,' he said. 'I don't like these days no more. All

I gots is an old actipuss, and that don't taste very nicely. I remembers my

wife Jane used to cook a lovely turk this time of year. Oh, she cooked that

turk so special. The smell of it, I can all but smell it in me nostrel now. And

I used to steal a lovely tree from John Handy's wood. I used to climb up

a ladle and put the pretty star on the top. And then there was the fireboys

who came singeing at our door, their breaths full of gists. They brung a

right old ruckus they did.'

A spurt of ink suddenly jetted from one of the octopus's glands and

splashed the tall man in the face. Giving up, he flung the thing aside and

it slapped against a rock like a wet jumper with too many arms. 'Time to

go an check on the latest miracle,' he said to himself, and tramped off in

the direction of the beach again.

Exploring the area a little further, the Doctor came upon another oddity.

Someone - or something - had placed about fifty or sixty coconut halves in

an arcane pattern on an outcrop of rock overlooking the sea.

'What a conundrum,' said the Doctor, his eyes gleaming. The coconuts

had been arranged in such a fashion as to intimate a message of some sort,

the Doctor felt - though he had no idea what it might be. He tried

looking

at them from every angle, checking to see if they lined up with the setting

sun, as a stone circle might

'Best go and get Jo,' he decided after a while, scratching his head. 'She

may be in some kind of danger.' Relishing the idea of interrupting Jo's dull

sun bath with news of a possible adventure, the Doctor scrambled off back

down in the direction of the beach.

The tall man watched with squinting eyes as the Doctor slid in a hurried

but dignified way down the black rocks. 'It's that fellow again, the one

with a cape like a supperman. He do look a bit flustered, like he's lost

something voluble. I hope he finds it again, I really do.'

He let out a sudden laugh as the grey-haired man appeared to stop and

look up in his direction, then continued gruffly on his way. 'Blimey, that

miracle's got ears. I'll have to make shire I don't say much from now on. I

don't want any trouble from him. I'll just watch him another few minutes

and he'll probably evaporate like that peacebox.'

'Jo... Jo!' the Doctor called in an excitable way across the beach.

Jo looked up from her book to see the Doctor waving an arm wildly and

repeatedly stumbling over himself in the sand.

'It seems,' said the Doctor between awfully heavy breaths as he arrived at

her towel, 'we're not alone here. Not at all.'

'What do you mean?' said Jo suspiciously.

'Nothing to worry about I'm sure. But something or someone has

been... *arranging* up there on the rocks.'

'Arranging what?'

'Coconuts, my dear. Coconuts!' Jo looked at him with her eyebrows

raised. 'Well, don't just stand there, Jo. Come and have a look.'

At the top of the island, the Doctor showed Jo what he had found.

'Are you sure you haven't done this?' said Jo with a sideways glance.

'I've done nothing of the sort,' said the Doctor indignantly. 'What a

ridiculous suggestion.' They looked again at the coconut patterns.

'You know,' said the Doctor. 'That looks an awful lot like a Righteous

Ghost.'

'A what?'

'Righteous Ghost. We used to hear tales of them on Gallifrey when I

was growing up. Big, white creatures with wings and circular appendages

hovering above their heads.'

'Otherwise known as angels,' said Jo.

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'I suppose they were comparable to angels.'

'You know, Doctor, you're right. That's what this is. It's an angel. Look,

it's even got a halo.'

The Doctor took a few steps backwards, tilted his head and surveyed the

coconuts proudly.

'Yes, I am right, aren't I?'

'But that doesn't tell us who put them there. Or why.'

'Quite,' said the Doctor. 'Of course, whoever did this could be long

dead.' Even as he soberly said this, the Doctor could hardly contain his

excitement at the fact that it might not be a coincidence, but something

more sinister.

'Let's split up,' he said.

'Good idea,' said Jo.

'We'll cover every inch of this island and we won't stop till we've found

something, even if it's only a pile of bones.'

'Or an angel,' said Jo.

'Indeed,' said the Doctor. 'Indeed.'

But three hours of scouring produced precisely nothing. Jo checked the

western half of the island, which took her into several neat little coves and

a shallow network of caves. The Doctor, meanwhile, looked in the east,

scrambling over boulders and under the braided hair of a waterfall. It was

all very beautiful, but none ofit yielded anything vaguely resembling life.

They met back at the tree with equally puzzled faces.

'Utterly mysterious,' said the Doctor.

'Completely,' agreed his companion.

'Well, there's nothing for it but to go back,' said the Doctor, and a sense

of disappointment entered his voice.

'Doctor,' said Jo, as they turned their back on the tree and coconuts and

began climbing down again, 'what date is it today?'

The tall man stood quietly, stubbornly behind his palm tree. The

girl and man had both evaporated now, but the original mirage still

remained. Gingerly, he made his way across the beach towards it. 'What

strangenesses,' he was muttering. 'Thank you dear Lord for delivering

these strangenesses unto me on this Christmas Day. And Santa Claus

too. Thank you both kindly. You are such kind gents. And what a lovely

present this miracle is. It almost looks real with the sun behind it, don't

it? What lovely boxes. It reminds me of my last Christmas with my wifey.

She got me a tool booth I remembers, and inside was all the tools I needed

to make my woodens. I used to like to make my woodens, didn't I? There

was hummers and neils and sees and saws and a screwdriver. But this box

is much much bigger. And it looks so real, like I could almost nearly maybe

reach out and touch it.'

The tall man's finger extended out extremely carefully towards the

mirage as it faded from sight.

In Italy, naughty children are likely to find a piece of coal in their stockings rather than gifts.

Italy 47 BC

The Best of Days

David Cromarty

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor, with Ace

... continuo ut die periret, Saturnalibus, optimo dierum!

... he might die the next day, on Saturnalia, the best of days!

Catullus, 1st Century BC

The TARDIS faded into existence in a quiet alley, the sound of its materialisation almost drowned out by the noise from the nearby marketplace. As the door opened, the voice of a teenage girl could be heard.

'And that's all you're going to tell me? A Christmas surprise?'

'To tell you any more would rather destroy the surprise,' the Doctor replied good-naturedly. 'Let's just say it's something a little different to your usual puddings, trees and carols.'

Ace shrugged, defeated. 'So where are we then?'

'Rome, December 17th,' the Doctor replied, proudly. 'Two thousand and thirty-something years before your time.'

'So it's BC. As in, Before Christ. How can we be celebrating Christmas?'

'Something different, Ace?' The Doctor offered her his arm.

'All right, Professor,' Ace smiled, taking his arm. 'Impress me.'

'Hurry up,' the slave ordered. His master rearranged the weight on his back and struggled to catch up - he was tempted to abandon the whole pretence. The slave seemed to have adjusted to his temporary position

far too well. But, Aullus reasoned, Marcus had always been loyal, and it

was harmless enough to allow him this festive measure of freedom once

a year.

And besides, Aullus was becoming too scared to argue.

Lost in thought, he stumbled, losing his grip on the package. It fell to

the floor and he scrambled to retrieve it, praying nothing was damaged.

He staggered again as Marcus struck him on the back.

'How many times must I tell you to be careful, old man?' the slave

roared. 'I have very special plans for this festival.'

'That's enough!' came an imperious voice. Marcus turned to see a

wealthy-looking man hurrying towards them. 'I don't care if it is the

Saturnalia, slave. Treat your master with respect.'

'It's fine, Gaius,' Aullus muttered as he got to his feet. 'No harm done.'

But the man wouldn't be put off.

'Really. It's one thing to give them a little fan, but this sort of behaviour

is intolerable.'

Marcus seized the newcomer's neck. 'I think you'll find things are

about to change.'

• • *

Ace looked around the market, unimpressed. It wasn't a patch on Camden.

The Doctor's hearts were no doubt in the right place, but... She looked

across at her travelling companion, and realised he was in full-on

lecture

mood. She made herself pay attention.

'...the most popular holiday in the Roman calendar, the Saturnalia was

dedicated to the god...' He let the sentence hang in the air.

'It wouldn't be Saturn, by any chance?' Ace asked good-humouredly.

She'd started paying attention just in time.

'Very good,' the Doctor smiled. 'The, ah, sacrifice is over, thankfully.

But if we make our way to the temple, we should be just in time for the

unbinding of the statue.'

'The what?'

'The statue of Saturn,' the Doctor explained. 'The statue's legs are kept

tied up with wool all year. But during the Saturnalia, the statue is unbound,

symbolising the god's liberation.'

'Makes a change from a carol service, I suppose. Lead on, Professor.'

'Happy Saturnalia!'

The time travellers turned to see a girl of about eight or nine walking

towards them with a friendly smile.

'And the same to you,' the Doctor replied, beaming.

'I'm Rhea,' the girl said. 'I've got you a present.' She held out a hand

to Ace.

'For me?' Ace asked, surprised.

'Of course it's for you,' Rhea answered calmly. She handed Ace a small

stone, smooth and rounded.

'Thanks, Rhea,' Ace said, trying to muster some enthusiasm. 'It's... a

pebble.' She turned it over. 'With a face drawn on i t '

'Forgive my friend,' the Doctor replied, offering a winning smile. 'It's

her first Saturnalia. She hasn't quite got the hang of it yet I'm sure in time

she'll find a use for it'

Rhea smiled. 'I do hope so.'

'It's a very unusual looking stone. Where did you -'

'Looks like I'm not the only one missing the Saturnalia spirit,' Ace

interrupted, pointing towards the end of the street, where three men were

arguing loudly.

'I wonder what that's about?' The Doctor was already making his way

towards the three men. Ace turned to say goodbye to Rhea, but she seemed

to have run off somewhere.

Kids, Ace thought and followed the Doctor. He had stepped into the

middle of the fight, smiling broadly.

'Hello, I'm the Doctor.'

The men froze. Ace appeared at the Doctor's side.

'And this is my friend Ace.'

'Hi.'

'Is there some land of disagreement? I've found myself rather adept at

negotiation in the past. Perhaps I could be of some use.'

The wealthy-looking man was rubbing his sore throat. Red finger marks

stood out against the pale flesh.

'You should keep your slave under control, Aullus,' he choked. 'I'm

going to report this.'

The old man watched him go, then turned his scared eyes to the Doctor.

'It's fine,' he said. 'This is all just a simple misunderstanding.'

'Now, now, *master,'* his slave admonished. 'Where are your manners?' He

turned to face the Doctor. 'Thank you for your help. Would you care to join

us for tonight's banquet?'

The old man stepped in front ofthe Doctor. 'Marcus, I'm not sure...'

'I insist.' Marcus placed his hand on his master's shoulder. He smiled

cruelly as he tightened his grip, enjoying the old man's discomfort. 'It's

the least we can do to welcome them to the city.' He looked at the Doctor.

'It's obvious they've travelled a long way.'

'Of course,' said the old man reluctantly. 'They would be most welcome.'

He listened quietly as the slave gave directions to his house.

'Until then, a token of our respect.' Marcus held one hand out towards

the Doctor. He was holding an earthenware figurine. 'Happy Saturnalia.'

By the time they reached the temple, the unbinding ceremony was over.

Slaves and their masters were drifting away, back to their homes to prepare

for their evening meal.

'So, for the length of the festival, the slaves are in charge?' Ace was

becoming more interested.

'Not in charge,' the Doctor said. 'More like equals. Well, pretend equals.

They can eat a grand dinner but still have to do the washing up, that sort

of thing.'

'That Marcus seemed to think he was in charge though.'

'Yes, I noticed that,' said the Doctor, drily.

'So most slaves wouldn't act like that, even during the festival?'

'No. Something else is going on here.' The Doctor reached into his

pocket and produced the present Marcus had given him. His eyes moved

from the figurine to the statue of Saturn inside the temple. The woollen

bonds lay on the floor. He held up a finger to feel the air.

'When you were a child, I suppose you noticed the change in the

atmosphere at Christmas?'

Ace shrugged. 'I suppose.'

'There's a special energy in the air at times like this. Times of ceremony.

A psychic force. And in this temple that energy is several thousand times

the strength it should be. It's as if, instead of the energy ebbing away

naturally each year after each unbinding, it's been allowed to collect. To

accrue. It's being stored up here in this temple. And, after this year's

ceremony, it seems to have reached its critical mass.'

The Doctor made a fist with his hand, breaking the little statue that

Marcus had given him. He let the fragments fall back into his pocket.

'A job for us?' Ace grinned.

'I don't see anyone else volunteering.'

'What sort of present was that, anyway? Looked a bit ugly to me.'

'Saturnalia et sigillaricia. It's traditional to exchange gifts at the festival.

Small statues of Saturn, very popular with children.' The Doctor looked

at his pocket watch. 'I think it's time we were going, Ace. I've got a little

shopping to do before dinner.'

'Shopping?'

'Well, our host was kind enough to give us a present. It's only fair I

return the favour.'

A heavy silence hung over the candlelit room. Marcus sat at one end,

wearing a white toga with a purple band. Aullus stood unhappily against

the wall, his manner utterly defeated.

The Doctor was reclining on a couch, enthusiastically tucking into the

feast, apparently oblivious to the tension in the room.

Small figurines of Saturn were everywhere; on shelves, on the floor, on

the table. Ace felt like smashing something, before eventually deciding to

only break the silence.

'Nice place you've got here, Aullus.'

Aullus gave a small nod in reply. Ace glanced around.

'Lots of these statues.'

'Yes, it does seem that lots of friends have given you presents,' the Doctor agreed. 'Though they do display a certain lack of imagination.'

'My uncle had the same problem with socks,' remarked Ace.

The Doctor frowned and continued eating.

'You know a lot of our customs, Doctor,' observed Marcus, eyeing him closely. 'For one who comes from so far away.'

'I've learnt a lot on my travels.'

'And what have you learnt of Saturn?'

'A Roman god. He ruled the universe, but it was prophesied that one of his children would overthrow him. So he devoured every child his wife gave birth to.'

'Nice,' Ace remarked with a grimace.

'Unfortunately for Saturn, his wife Ops, or Rhea to the Greeks...' the Doctor paused, glancing at Ace, '... tricked him. She fooled Saturn into swallowing a stone instead of his last child, Jupiter. The child grew up safely and years later he forced his father to drink poison. Saturn regurgitated all his children, who joined Jupiter in waging a terrible war against him. Eventually Jupiter was triumphant.'

'And did you know that if Saturn had remained in power, the world would have been very different to how it is now?' Marcus asked angrily.

'Did you know that Saturn does not believe that any group of men

should

be enslaved by another? Did you know that Saturn - were he to take power

again - would grant slaves the rights that we have been denied?'

'I'm not surprised that's what he's promised you,' the Doctor replied.

He turned to Ace. 'It seems that this poor fool wants to help Saturn back to

power.' He smiled sadly. 'And he actually thinks I'd let him do it.'

'But Doctor, you cannot stop it.' Marcus stood up. 'It's already started.'

He raised an arm above his head. 'It's time,' he said.

There was a creaking, groaning noise. One by one, the statues of Saturn

around the room matched his gesture.

'That's an interesting trick,' remarked the Doctor. Ace looked round

in horror as each small figurine began to swell in size. Their shadows

lengthened across the floor.

'As you noticed,' Marcus gloated, revelling in her fear, 'I have lots of

statues.'

The statues were almost as tall as Ace, and still growing. Marcus took a

menacing step towards her, and the statues did the same.

'No!' Aullus lunged forward suddenly. His arms were outstretched,

reaching towards his slave, but he was blocked by two of the statues,

who held him fast. He tried to pull away, but the statues held firm.

Marcus watched his former master struggle for a moment, enjoying his

helplessness, then gave a slight nod. One of the statues raised an arm and

closed its fingers around Aullus's neck. Aullus's struggles became more

frantic, his arms flailing about desperately. Then he went limp.

Ace looked at Marcus, angry tears in her eyes.

'Who are you?' asked the Doctor.

'I am the Lord of Misrule,' Marcus said. 'Saturn is waking, Doctor. And

you shall be of some use to him before you die.'

Ace backed towards the door. The Doctor followed her, talking fast. 'By

the way, Marcus. May I just say what a fine job you've done of making the

place look festive.' He reached into his pocket, and grabbed a handful of

the crumbled remains of Marcus's present. 'The living statues are a nice

touch, of course, but it's good to see you haven't neglected the subtler

details, such as the candles.'

He threw the dust at the nearest candle, and the flame shot into the air,

bathing the entire room in light.

The Doctor pushed Ace roughly out of the door and slammed it shut

behind them.

'Go back to the TARDIS,' he ordered. 'I have something to do. I'll join

you in a while.'

Ace ran towards the forum, heading for the TARDIS. If nothing else, she

thought, she would at least be able to grab some Nitro-9. But when she

heard the noise coming from the Temple of Saturn, she changed tack

There were only a few people still trading in the market Most of them

had returned home or gone to visit friends for the feast. Only the handful

left selling last-minute statues felt the ground around the Temple of Saturn

starting to shake, or heard the roar the statue let out as it started to grow.

Ace was knocked to the ground as a huge foot broke through the wall of

the temple. As she dusted herself down and looked up, she saw the statue

of Saturn towering over her. It had doubled in size since the last time

she had seen it, and its body had hardened to stone and turned a vibrant

orange. It stared around the forum with jet black eyes.

Harryhausen *would* be proud, Ace thought. She could see stalls in the

marketplace collapsing as the statues they were selling grew and came to

life. People came running from nearby homes, desperately trying to get

away from statues that had been given to them as innocent presents by

friends and relatives. Everywhere she looked, men and women were being

knocked to the ground with a single blow or trampled in the chaos.

Everyone except for the slaves.

'Slaves of Rome!' the giant statue roared. 'I offer you a choice. Join me,

and you shall know genuine freedoms you have never imagined. Refuse

me, and you die with your masters. Do you want to be humiliated every

year with the pretence of freedom? Or do you want true freedom today?'

Ace looked wildly round at the faces around her and was horrified to see

the slaves around her considering the offer. She grabbed the arm of the

nearest man. 'Get real, mate. Does this really look like someone you want

to trust?'

The statue turned its dark eyes slowly towards her. 'Those slaves who

wish to serve me... bring me that girl.'

Before she knew what was happening, she was surrounded by slaves

grabbing at her, eager to please their new master. They dragged Ace into

the temple's ruins and forced her to kneel.

'Explain where you came by the weapon in your pocket' The statue's

voice had dropped to a quiet rumble.

'There's nothing in my pocket,' said Ace, surprised. She was wishing

she did have some sort of weapon. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she

saw the little girl she had met that morning standing among the broken

bricks. Ace was surprised to notice her broad smile. Then she remembered

the pebble that the little girl had given her. She pulled it out and held it up

for the statue to see. 'Just this stone.'

'Where did you get the weapon?' Saturn repeated.

'It's only a Christmas present,' said Ace angrily. 'Why don't you take a look?' She bent her arm back and threw the stone at the statue as hard as she could. It was inches away from the statue's mouth when he snatched it out of the air, holding it above his head. A cruel smile on his lips, the statue crushed the stone, sending tiny fragments falling all around him.

'You expect to defeat me with *the* same trick twice?' he demanded. But he was staring at the little girl.

'It won't be the same trick,' Rhea whispered, so quietly that only Ace could hear. 'Just a remarkably similar one.'

There was a loud shout from behind them. 'Io, Saturnalia!'

Ace groaned as Marcus strode purposefully into the ruined temple.

'You summoned me?' he said.

'My faithful Lord of Misrule.' Saturn smiled almost affectionately. 'Would you be so kind as to take care of this little girl?'

'Happy to, my lord,' Marcus said as he produced a knife. Before Ace could stop him, he grabbed Rhea with his left hand and pressed the knife against her throat. The smile vanished from the little girl's face. It was replaced not with a look of fear, but one of pity. Marcus paused.

'Finish her!' the statue ordered.

'I'm so sorry I'm late,' the Doctor declared as he staggered into the ruins.

He smiled apologetically. 'The temple's changed since I was last here.'

He

looked at the holes in the roof and walls. 'Let's hope it doesn't rain.'

'Finish her now!' Saturn roared.

'No!' said the Doctor, and for just a moment the rage on his face

was every bit a match for the statue's. 'Don't you wonder, Marcus, why

someone as powerful as your master needs help in ridding himself of a

little girl? Don't you wonder, in fact, why a god as powerful as this needs

you at all?'

'I do not question my master!'

'How very obedient. Well, for your information, this little girl used to be

your master's *wife*. A long time ago, and when they were both in different

forms, of course. But their marriage vows have slightly more power than

those of humans. Amongst other things, they render these two physically

incapable of ever harming each other. That's why he needs you, Marcus.

He knew Rhea would try to stop him no matter what, and he couldn't harm

her himself. So he is using you to do his dirty work.' The Doctor turned

and addressed the statue. 'You remember, of course, the way that Rhea

tricked you with the stone, all that time ago? Don't feel bad about that, by

the way, it happens to the best of us. Even I...'

'Be silent!' warned Saturn. 'My patience has limits.'

'Of course,' the Doctor gave a small bow. 'My most profound apologies.'

He produced a bottle from his pocket and carried on talking. 'The point is

that when you were defeated, you were fed a stone, then poisoned. I hardly

need to point out to you that those who don't learn from history are, nine

times out of ten, doomed to repeat it.'

The Doctor turned suddenly, throwing the bottle of poison at the

statue. It flew through the air and smashed against the statue's head. The

Doctor's aim was almost perfect The burning liquid ran down the statue's

face and into his mouth. The statue stood still, apparently unaffected, then

looked at the Doctor and let out a deep, guttural laugh.

'Just one problem, Professor,' Ace muttered apologetically. 'I did throw

a stone at him. But he didn't swallow it.'

'What?' The Doctor's mind raced. He looked frantically around the

temple, trying to see something he could use against the statue.

Then he saw Rhea. The knife was still at her throat, but she was smiling

again.

'We don't need the same trick,' she said calmly.

The Doctor's face creased with confusion.

'When Saturn was flesh and blood, he could be poisoned like any other

creature of flesh and blood,' said the little girl. 'But now that he inhabits

that crude form, things work a little differently. I provided the right kind

of stone. And you have just played your part to perfection.'

Ace stared at the giant statue. The Doctor's poison was reacting with the

fragments of stone that she had thrown. Brightly coloured sparks danced

around the statue as its arms and legs began to stiffen, returning to their

original position. The statue let out an agonised howl as it shrunk back to

its original size.

Marcus dropped the knife and brought both hands up to his head.

Outside the temple, the living statues froze in position, many of them

overbalancing and falling to the ground as they started shrinking.

'Rhea!' Ace shouted. But the little girl had vanished.

Marcus let out another howl of pain.

'He's been psychically linked to the god all day,' the Doctor said. 'I

imagine he's experiencing some considerable feedback.'

'What about Rhea? Where's she gone?'

'I don't know, Ace. With any luck, she's dealt with her past. She'll

go forward with her life and do whatever it is godlike alien entities do

when they're not interested in subjugating other species.' The Doctor

considered. 'You were looking at her just before she vanished. How did

she look to you?'

Ace thought about this for a moment.

'She looked at peace.'

Later that day, the Doctor and Ace stood by the remains of the temple's

back wall. At the other end of the ruins, a priest - the Saturnalicus princeps,

according to the Doctor - was re-tying the woollen bonds around the

statue's legs. The Doctor stood silently watching,

'Doctor?'

He turned to regard his companion. She hesitated before speaking.

'What will happen to Marcus? The statue had sort of - taken him over,

hadn't it? Made him all those promises. It's not like he had much choice.'

'I very much doubt the Roman justice system will take that into account.

It was ahead of its time in many ways, but...'

'He'll be executed?'

The Doctor nodded slowly. 'He killed his master, Ace. He killed

Aullus.'

'But that's... '

'Unfair?' The Doctor interrupted her. 'He was a slave. His entire life was

unfair. Even this festival... it didn't do anything except remind slaves of

their status; offering them a tiny glimpse of the rights they were denied

the rest of the year.'

Ace said nothing.

'We can't fix everything, Ace. We do our best, try to keep history on

track. But the past is full of injustices that can't be fixed, massacres that

can't be averted, terrible deeds that can't be undone.'

Ace shuddered, and nodded at the statue.

'It is over, isn't it? He won't be back?'

'I hope not.' The Doctor smiled. 'But if he is, we'll find a way to stop

him.'

Ace began to speak again, but the Doctor stopped her, pointing to the

far end of the temple. The statue has been re-bound. It took Saturn many,

many years to build up enough power to stage this return. By the time he's

built up enough power again, no one will believe in the old gods any more.

The unbinding ceremony will stop and other religions and ideas take over.

The feast of Sol Invictus will supplant Saturnalia, then that in turn will be

taken over by Christian festivities. There's a theory that December 25th

was selected as Christmas Day because it was already observed as a holiday

by the Romans.'

Ace could tell he was trying to cheer her up, so she smiled. But they

walked back to the TARDIS in silence.

One memorable Christmas dinner took place in Papua New Guinea in 1974 when it is said four Dutch families were killed and eaten in the Jayawijaya Mountains.

Papua New **Guinea 2012**

Conscription

William Potter

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Sarah Jane

The sky burned crimson over a smouldering world. It cast the wreckage of a city as

jagged silhouettes. Electricity raised the hackles on a lone figure. Long coat and scarf trailing, he staggered over rubble that was once a highway. Abandoned vehicles were

now melted, distorted frames, only useful as shields or barricades.

The visitor paused to determine the direction of approaching laser fire, then leapt

over a ditch onto flagstones. A band of guerrillas was coming closer. It was time to

take cover.

The military museum had once had the fine, vaulted ceiling of a cathedral. Now its

roof was blasted away. The remains of exhibits - statues, cabinets, dioramas - were

lit only by the sky's flames. Charred trophies from countless aggressions, neatly

alphabetised, lay forgotten in drifts of glass. Significantly, an armoury display had

been plundered.

Resonance from a gamma grenade shattered the single remaining window, and the

visitor retreated to the halls beyond. In one room, a diagram caught his eye - a star

map charting paths from this world. Beneath it, a dais had survived the shelling. On

it lay a golden disc. The visitor rubbed his fingertips over the disc's raised

inscription, deciphering its code. He charged the console with a sonic implement from his pocket

and turned the disc in its seat to trigger an animation. On the map, an arc of light

plotted a course to a distant, minor star system. The visitor tensed. The star's third planet was singled out, a world most familiar to him.

Suddenly, weapons light exploded from the hall outside. The visitor wrenched the

disc from the display, pocketed it and fled.

Sarah Jane Smith could smell burning. As she entered the control room,

she saw the Doctor beating out his singed scarf.

'Merry Christmas, Doctor!'

'What? Is it?'

Sarah raised her wrist.

'I keep my watch set to the time I left. It's Christmas morning on

Earth.'

The Doctor laughed and patted the TARDIS control panel.

'When you travel through space and time, it can be Christmas whenever

you want it to be. Every day if you like!' The Doctor eyed a small, inlaid box

lying on the console. 'I suppose it is fitting... '

Sarah followed his eyes. 'You got me a present!' she gasped in surprise.

But the Doctor put his hand over the box, to stop her touching it 'Oh, I

thought.. '

The Doctor's voice turned grave. 'This is not for you, Sarah. This "gift"

is expected elsewhere.'

Sarah sighed and ignored the snub. 'Talking of Christmas gifts... ' She

gingerly offered the Doctor the simply wrapped present she'd concealed

behind her back. 'It's nothing. Just a knick-knack I found in my room... '

The Doctor raised an eyebrow and smiled as he took it.

'Why, that's very thoughtful of you!' He knew what it was before he had

unwrapped it. 'An antagon resonator!'

He held it up to the light of the time rotor, admiring its rainbow hue.

Mounted in a lattice of circuitry, the gemlike facades of the device worked

the light like a prism.

'Rather pretty, isn't it? But deadly.'

Sarah raised her eyebrows. 'Then why would you leave it lying around

where it could... '

The Doctor tossed it towards Sarah who, startled, caught it, but only just.

He grinned. 'Oh, it's perfectly harmless within the TARDIS. It dampens

the signal needed to release its power.'

Ignoring Sarah's agitation, the Doctor reached for the materialisation

switch. The TARDIS groaned and came to a halt

'Why was your scarf on fire when I came in?'

The Doctor pushed out his bottom lip.

'I... well, I just got into a spot of bother. I shouldn't worry about it'

'Was there a fire on board?'

'No, no, not on board the TARDIS! I was out... sightseeing.'

'Why didn't you wake me?'

'It didn't occur to me. You were resting. I often pop out while you're asleep.'

'For someone with so much time on his hands, you don't like to spend any sleeping.'

'Time Lords have a unique perspective on the value of time.'

Sarah smiled. 'Well, I do hope you'll find the time to celebrate Christmas with me. I've got an idea...'

The Doctor gave a sudden grin. 'Would you like to celebrate Christmas on Earth, Sarah Jane?' He tapped the little box on the console. 'I have to...

deliver a Christmas p r e s e n t '

'Oh, yes please!'

'It might be dangerous. Maybe it's better if you don't come.'

'I can look after myself.'

The Doctor looked intently at Sarah Jane.

'Very well. But stay close to me. What awaits us outside is unlikely to be filled with Christmas cheer. It may kill without a moment's warning, without compulsion...' He looked at her ruffled blouse, flimsy petticoat skirt and wedge-heeled shoes, attire more suitable for a Christmas celebration. 'And you'll need your Wellingtons.'

'Doctor!' sobbed Sarah. 'My boots are full of water! You could have -'

'Sarah,' the Doctor insisted. 'You must keep your voice down.'

'But,' Sarah sank onto a trunk and grimaced, 'there are leeches!'

She plucked a swollen, slimy leech from the exposed flesh above her

Wellington boot. It left a trickle of blood. Sarah tugged the boot away from

her foot and groaned. Her sock was drenched red. Leeches were feasting.

She had been following the Doctor for over an hour, wading through

a swamp, forcing a path through dense vegetation and scrambling over

moss-carpeted trunks. Machetes would have been useful had either of

them had one. The air was full of whooping bird calls and swarms of

bloodthirsty insects. Foliage rustled in the canopy as creatures took wing

or leapt between the branches. Rain and the moist heat had drenched

the Doctor and Sarah's clothes. Thorny vines had torn at the fabric. The

Doctor's already part-cremated scarf was ragged with unhooked threads

yet he paused in his long stride only to check the inlaid box. A red light on

it winked at intervals as the Doctor waved it ahead of them to determine a

path forward. Sarah prayed the homing device would also lead them back

- she had long given up hope of memorising their route.

'I thought you'd be glad to spend Christmas at home,' said the Doctor.

'I live in South Croydon.' She gaped and froze. Only her eyes moved,

watching a vivid-green tree python wind its way between her feet.

'Doctor... Doctor... '

'Shh!' The Doctor froze too but he wasn't looking in her direction. He

pointed to a simple snare just ahead of his boot It was crafted from an

insulated cable. The Time Lord carefully stepped over it, then checked the

signal on his homing device again. 'We're near.'

The snake had passed. Sarah gritted her teeth and tugged her waterlogged

boot back on, creeping past the snare.

'Remind me not to take you to Magellan Five,' the Doctor remarked,

waving his scanner ahead. 'There are leeches there ten metres long!'

Sarah was too distracted by the whispers and cracks in the jungle to pay

attention. Every bush threatened poisonous thorns, biting armies of ants

or a predator ready to strike. Something in the forest behind her disturbed

a pair of cockatoos. Sarah turned. She swore she caught a glimpse of a

figure. But whatever it was that had spooked the birds was again concealed

by the f o r e s t

The Doctor led her into a clearing. A branch snapped and the pair spun

around to catch a boar darting into the bush. The Doctor lifted his hat and

wiped his brow with a handkerchief.

Ahead was a shelter. Beneath palm leaves, bamboo frames and the

creeping spread of moss was something that didn't belong here. At first,

it seemed too small to be a spaceship. A third of it lay submerged in the

mud and its structure was bent and dented. The jungle was claiming it

Metal sheeting appeared sewn together as fibrous plants spread roots

into the veins of earth between panels. Once-immaculate grey finishes

bore the tide marks of the rainy season, and were crusted in bird dung.

The writing on the side had been mostly worn away, but the language was

clearly alien.

It seemed deserted but the Doctor was hesitant. He looked left, right and

above, and listened. After a minute he approached the ship, ducking under

a makeshift porch of leaves, and pushed open the door.

'What is this?' whispered Sarah.

'It's not abandoned, that's for sure,' said the Doctor.

The door swung freely. The hinges were free of plant growth. Someone

or something was using this entrance regularly. Despite this, the interior

was in disarray. Papers were scattered over the floor and twig-sized bones

formed a mound in a corner, the remnants of raw meals. Pinned to a

desk by the talons of a cassowary was the fur and flesh of some jungle

creature, gorged on, dissected, or hunted for its pelt. Hung from a power

coupling was a gory souvenir, a tribal tooth necklace and a bone earring

still attached to the ear. A human ear.

Ignoring this exhibition of horrors, the Doctor followed his homing

device. He motioned it in an arc across the room and finally saw a small

wall console with a winking amber light.

'This is it.' The Doctor slipped the device into his coat pocket and felt

around the sides of the console until he encountered a switch. With a click,

the amber light flicked out. He considered for a moment, then wrenched

the console away from the wall.

'Isn't that vandalism?' asked Sarah.

'I suppose it is, yes.'

He crushed the delicate circuits of the console under his heel, then

began to search frantically through the files and papers strewn across the

floor. From the stench it was clear several documents had been used as

toilet paper.

'Ah!' He waved a laminated form triumphantly at Sarah Jane. 'It's just as

I thought.'

'I hope it was worth trudging through the swamp for,' said Sarah.

An abandoned alien craft in the heart of the jungle certainly merited

investigation she was sure. But couldn't it have waited till after Christmas?

She was filthy from the jungle trek and nauseated by the ship's contents.

'Good news, Sarah. This was the only one sent to Earth.' The Doctor, as usual, was answering his own questions. 'And this pod appears to have been too damaged on landing to send or receive messages.'

'Where' s *the* pilot?' asked Sarah.

'There was no pilot,' said *the* Doctor.

'Then, can we leave? Let UNIT deal with this?'

The Doctor frowned. 'When I said there was no pilot, I didn't mean the pod was empty. Something is out there somewhere. Lonely, desperate-angry.'

And with that he strode towards the exit and across the clearing with Sarah in pursuit.

'What's out there? What's angry?' Sarah huffed. Clearly it was going to take some effort to extract a full explanation from the Doctor.

Wa-wa-wagh! Before either of them could reach the forest, the bushes came alive. Aggressive chants came from every direction and they were surrounded by a group of twenty tribesmen. The men were naked except for gourds and ragged, rattan hair nets. Their faces were striped with soot, ochre and white pigment, greased with pork fat. Bird-of-paradise feathers were tucked into their thong headbands. Some bore blackened scars mimicking toothmarks down their backs and their eyes were reddened from inhaling the ceremonial smoke of a shaman. One man, shorter and

meaner-looking then the rest, lacked an ear. The tribe raised arrows, stone-

headed clubs and daggers worn from bone. They were ready for war.

The Doctor stepped in front of Sarah and held up his hands.

'Good afternoon, gentlemen! You must be the infamous tribe of New

Guinea. So good of you to arrange a welcoming party. I am the Doctor,

and this is -'

'Infamous? Infamous for what?' asked Sarah, clinging onto the Doctor's

coat

'Er... cannibalism,' coughed the Doctor. 'At least they used to be...'

Wa-wa-wag h! The tribe roared their disapproval. Something had clearly

upset them. One of them shook his club at the alien ship and the man

missing an ear indicated his deficiency with particular fervour.

'Sarah,' whispered the Doctor, 'on the count of three, run back to the

ship. One... '

Several tribesmen drew back their bowstrings.

'... Run!'

In a storm of arrows, clatter of spears and raging cries of charging

warriors, the Doctor and Sarah sprinted back to the ship, slamming the

door on their assailants. The door had a bolt but it was weakened and

unlikely to hold off a relentless attack. They pushed a table up against it.

It seemed a puny measure.

The craft shook and echoed with the hammer of wood, stone and fist

The thick, clear plastic of a porthole cracked and shattered as an axe

smashed through, followed by an arm that reached in and grabbed Sarah's

hair. She screamed and twisted away. Quickly, the Doctor grabbed a talon

that pinned the animal skin to the desk and stabbed it into the back of the

tribesman's hand.

The window was too small to let the men in but wide enough for weapons

to pass. The Doctor and Sarah retreated to the far side of the ship. It was

dark and the floor crunched underfoot; Sarah preferred not to know what

lay there. The Doctor rifled through his pockets, tossing useless snacks

and half-repaired gadgets to the ground. Nothing came to hand that could

save them. The door bolt creaked as it began to buckle under pressure. The

hammering and the whoops outside increased to a frenzy.

Then they stopped.

There were noises but they were hard to pick out, and not directed

against the ship. The Doctor and Sarah waited, slowing their breathing.

And they listened. Even the cries of birds had stopped. Sarah leant her

head against the Doctor's shoulder and shivered with delayed shock. He

hugged her protectively.

'We're going to be all right. They're leaving.'

Still there was no sound.

'I'm going to look outside.'

Sarah was regaining her composure. She grabbed a cassowary claw of

her own for protection. The Doctor crept up to the broken porthole and

peered through. He glimpsed the weapons of the tribe scattered on the

ground but could see no living thing. Still it was silent. Gently, the Doctor

moved the table away from the door. The Doctor looked back at Sarah

with the hint of a comforting smile, then he unbolted the door. His body

flew against the far wall as the door was thrust open from outside. Sarah

backed into the dark, away from the giant standing in the doorway.

It was more reptile than man, its skin tough with barbed scales, its jaws

long, slavering and crammed with teeth. It blinked with clear lids, showing

no emotion. Its armour showed a greater sophistication than its primeval

hide. The armour stretched across its torso seemed part life-support, with

a system of cables and fluid pumps penetrating the scaly flesh. Wires

detached from the chest plate and probed the air like antennae.

Trying to guess the reptilian's next move, Sarah glanced past it, out of

the door. There were at least two corpses splashed across the jungle floor

- tribesmen cut down as they had tried to flee. The reptilian raised its right

fist and aimed a chiselled bone spear at the Doctor's chest.

From his pocket, the Doctor produced the inlaid box and unplugged the

golden disc from within. It was a pathetic shield for a spear attack but it

delayed the reptilian's blow. The creature put its fist down and stared.

Sarah looked at the symbols on the disc, then at worn markings on the

giant's armour. Both matched the designs around the ship.

'Arhi giunt grann ouhnilocus!' The reptilian struggled to speak with a

throat unused to vocalising. 'Arhi... where did you find that?'

The Doctor dared to get to his feet but kept pressed against the wall. He

twirled the disc in his hand as if attempting to hypnotise the alien.

'I thought this might interest you.'

'Where did you get it?' The reptilian seemed astonished. 'You are not the

Coming Ones! Where are the Coming Ones? Where are my orders?'

The Doctor beckoned Sarah to get behind him.

'Your orders are to shut down.'

'Lies!' The reptilian bared its teeth and spilt yellow saliva onto the

littered floor. 'I am ready to fight What are my orders?'

'There are no "Coming Ones". They have their own problems. Your

orders are to shut down.'

'What has happened to the Coming Ones?' The creature was visibly

distressed. 'Why have they not come? They are undefeated! They fear

none!'

'Yes, yes...' The Doctor said in a tone that suggested he had heard it all

before. They had nothing to fear, except, it seems, themselves!'

The reptilian made a snapping noise with its teeth.

'I have seen your... their world, ravaged by civil war and climate

destruction brought about by their own weapons. There are pockets of

survivors, but they are like you. Cut off. Alone.'

The reptilian swayed back and forth. It was confused. Sarah sensed that

it was even afraid. This belligerent creature had been stranded without

guidance, struggling to survive for who knew how long.

The Doctor picked up a rusted circuit board; it crumbled in his hand.

'Your technology is past repair. Your fight is over. You must shut down.'

The Doctor had pushed the giant too far. Enraged, it stabbed its spear

into the floor and hurled the table and its contents aside. Gripping the

Doctor by his scarf, it lifted him off the floor, and slavered over his face.

'Do not mock me, primate. I will tear you and your companion to pieces,

then eat you raw.'

The Doctor raised the disc. With a click, it fitted perfectly into a cavity on

the reptilian's armour.

At once a halo appeared around its edge. The disc whirred into place like

a dial, bringing new elements of the armour to life.

The reptilian gasped. It released its grip on the Time Lord. The tubes

that pumped liquid into its beast's organs disconnected in a splash of

plasma. Metal buckles detached. The reptilian clutched its chest plate and

roared. It snapped its jaws and flailed towards the Doctor and Sarah Jane.

A light engulfed the reptilian warrior, making its skin appear transparent

for a moment Arteries and organs throbbing red, bones black but

twisting. The creature writhed in the glow and collapsed onto the floor as

the armour began to disassemble and separate from the figure it held.

The Doctor and Sarah squinted into the light, trying to follow what was

happening.

The muscular arms of the reptile withered as it lay belly-flat on the

floor. It opened its jaws for one last roar, no longer capable of words.

A tail grew from its lower spine like a vine, then the light dimmed. The

metamorphosis was complete but the menace was not removed. What lay

before the Doctor and Sarah was a fully grown, earthly crocodile, confused

and aggressive in an unnatural environment

The Doctor kicked a leg of the table away to place the furniture between

himself and the beast But the crocodile seemed uninterested in feasting.

It no longer had an alien mind. It craved escape. It whirled, then darted out

of the door into the green. The Doctor leapt over the table to bolt the door

shut again. Then he turned to Sarah, gasped and grinned.

Sarah looked at her hands. They were still trembling.

'Would you mind telling me what just happened?'

The Doctor was crouched beside the armour, pressing his ear against it

All the lights upon it had dimmed.

'Remarkable!' he exclaimed. He gestured at the golden disc on the chest

plate that had been their homing device. 'A Nervoid genetic manipulator.'

'A what?'

Sarah knelt hesitantly beside the alien apparatus. The Doctor tapped on

the disc.

'When I first saw it in the museum, I thought it was part of some

memorial. I quickly realised what it was, of course. I've never seen one in

action until now. I feel... honoured!'

'Was that... crocodile the pilot?'

'No. This pod was sent on an automatic trajectory, with this armour as

its cargo.'

'Who sent it?'

'Nervoids, Sarah. One of the most aggressive races in the galaxy. They

were geniuses but physically weak.'

'Nerdoids?'

'No, Nervoids,' the Doctor frowned. 'Nervoids avoided conflict

themselves. They designed armour that twisted native species into warriors

which they would control. And they demanded a continuous supply of

fighters.'

The Doctor gestured around the room.

'This pod must have been one of the last. On crash-landing, the armour

was released. It instinctively sought out the dominant species, adapted it

and controlled it.'

'Wait a minute,' said Sarah. 'The dominant species? Why did it choose

a crocodile?'

'Sarah,' the Doctor did well to avoid a patronising smile. 'Ifyou were

looking for a form perfectly suited to survive in a hostile jungle, would you

have chosen man?'

Sarah shrugged.

'The armour tests the limits of its subject's strength,' continued

the Doctor. 'Pitting it against other inhabitants. It started a small war

with the local tribes, I assume, while it waited for orders from its

masters. Had contact with the Nervoid homeworld been possible, more

armours would have followed. Earth would have been overrun by Nervoid-

controlled crocodilians!' He flashed a toothy grin. 'That would have been

inconvenient.'

Sarah raised an eyebrow at the understatement. 'So, the disc you

brought

is the off switch?'

'In part, but it's more like a hard drive. When I joined the two it began

downloading information and disengaging the armour from the host.'

The Doctor lifted the armour and headed to the door. 'I'll take this for

safekeeping.'

Sarah followed. Outside, she shielded her eyes with the Doctor's scarf

and gritted her teeth as they stepped over the remains of unfortunate

natives, disembowelled by the alien aggressor.

'Are you sure you know the way back to the TARDIS?' Sarah asked.

'I know it like the back of my head,' he grinned. Sarah was unsure if he

meant it as a joke. Until they reached the falls.

The roaring should have been a clue they were off course. Ahead of

them a violent cascade of water, thirty metres high, flushed over varnished

rocks. The bank down to it was close to a sheer drop with little to hold on

to except greasy tree roots and lianas.

'We have to cross,' the Doctor said. Sarah was less sure.

A barbed arrow flew past to wedge into the opposite bank.

'They've been following us for half an hour. We have to cross.'

He pointed to a slim trunk jammed against a pair of rocks that crossed

the torrent at an angle. Another arrow whistled by. The Doctor put down

the heavy, alien armour and unwrapped his scarf. Seemingly oblivious

to the approaching tribe and their darts, *the* Doctor gauged the distance

ahead then flung one end of his scarf to the opposing bank. It hooked first

time on the spur of a snapped branch. He tied his end to a root. Now they

had a hand rail to help them over the bridge.

'Cross, Sarah, cross!'

Sarah ducked another arrow and grabbed hold of the Doctor's hand as

he led her to the trunk.

'Hurry!'

Sarah began to mutter a complaint then thought the better of it. Balancing

on *the* slippery trunk while dodging arrows took all her concentration.

She made it and scrambled up the bank. The Doctor was right behind

her, having managed to cross holding onto the armour. He paused briefly

to consider retrieving his singed and sopping scarf but the arrival of

the tribe made up his mind. They were even more enraged than before,

perhaps blaming the strangers for the deaths at the ship. To them, the

Doctor and Sarah were as alien as an armoured, bipedal crocodilian.

'Doctor!' Sarah screamed.

'I'm there-'

But Sarah wasn't urging the Doctor on; she was warning him. While his

attention was focused on safely crossing the falls, he had failed to notice

the Nervoid armour winking back to life. Its twisted cables were seeking

a new host. Now, under a hailstorm of arrows and spears, the Doctor

writhed and fought against an assemblage of wires that probed to pierce

his flesh and inject him with fluids.

'Doctor!' Sarah screamed. She reached for a branch to help the fight, but

the wood was rotten. The tribe were now down the bank, at the water's

edge, preparing to cross the makeshift bridge. Sarah slid back down her

side and kicked the log free. A tribesman fell into the waters and was

pulled to safety, while the rest reached again for their bows. Sarah turned

to help the Doctor. A probe had clamped itself to the Doctor's scalp. His

eyes widened and expression froze. Beneath his long coat, his upper body

bulged as it gained muscle mass. Then, at the moment he seemed to have

succumbed, he gripped the armour's golden disc and twisted it loose. The

armour's electrical hum died and the metal disengaged. It propelled itself

into the falls and was swallowed by the water.

There was no chance of regaining it and now the arrows were flying

again. Pushing Sarah ahead of him, the Doctor scaled the bank and fled

into the undergrowth.

The TARDIS door eased shut and Sarah collapsed to her knees.

'Next time you tell me to stay behind, I'll take your advice!'

The Doctor pushed a switch to secure the TARDIS, then helped her back

to her feet. He smiled. 'When you take that advice, I'll stay behind too.'

'I thought we were lost.'

The Doctor draped his coat across the console. 'It was a short cut.'

He rubbed his shoulders. The effects of the genetic manipulator on his

body had been brief but excruciating.

Following a shower - in which she scrubbed away the bloody wounds of

countless leech feasts - and a change to fresh clothes, Sarah consulted

her watch again. There were still several minutes of her Christmas

remaining.

She re-entered the TARDIS control room. The Doctor seemed distracted

by other business but was clearly pleased when she spotted the Christmas

tree in the corner. On the top of the tree was the golden disc.

'Merry Christmas, Sarah.'

'And to you, Doctor.'

Sarah admired the decorations and examined the golden disc closely

for the first time. There seemed no circuitry, no sockets about it, merely

inscriptions, rather beautiful alien inscriptions.

'Is it safe?'

'On its own, yes. Unfortunately, the armour remains active.'

'But what if it takes control of something... someone else?'

The Doctor frowned.

'We have the off switch.'

As the TARDIS dematerialised and its light faded, another alien light

winked on under the water. Metallic tendrils probed the sand and

crannies of the pool at the foot of the waterfall, seeking life. Seeking the

dominant species. The water bubbled and a new reign of terror began, as

an enhanced crayfish gorged upon passing prey and waited for orders that

would never come, until its solar batteries died away.

Activities include harpoon throwing, igloo building and snowmobile racing.

Missionaries brought Christmas to Canada, and today the Inuit mark the holiday with feasts of caribou, seal and raw fish.

Canada 1966

Christmas in Toronto

Andrew Cartmel

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor

Up to this point in her life, the worst menace Jasmine Deering had ever

faced was dodging drunken stockbrokers who wanted to kiss her under

the mistletoe. In fact, that was what they were trying to do right now.

The stockbrokers worked for a firm in the KTBT building a couple of

floors down from Brockley and Campbell, the advertising agency where

Jasmine squandered (as she sometimes felt) her considerable talents

as an illustrator and animator. Right now Jasmine and the others were

in Gilchuck's Diner, just up the street from the building where they all

worked. The diner was steamy and full of Christmas cheer, with a heavily

decorated miniature tree by the cash register and long gleaming snakes of

tinsel and delicate snowflake mobiles hung from the ceiling. A radio was

playing behind the counter.

This has only happened twice before in recorded history,' said the voice

on the radio. T h e last time the lake froze over was in 1934. The least

likely ofthe Great Lakes to freeze because of its great depth and southerly

position, Lake Ontario has got the scientists baffled this winter. In the

last 24 hours, ice sheets of unprecedented thickness have been forming

alarmingly fast -' A hand reached out and twisted the dial on the radio,

tuning in a version of 'Jingle Bells' being played on an electric guitar. The

stockbrokers applauded.

The stockbrokers were all smoking and drinking coffee, delaying their

return to the office after a big lunch. It was the last Friday before the

Christmas holidays set in, and the mood of *the* whole city was festive

and relaxed - although the stockbrokers were anything but relaxed,

particularly Moore and Croft, the two most insistent young men in the

pack. They were the ones who were putting the most persistent effort

into trying to manoeuvre Jasmine under the mistletoe for the traditional

seasonal reward.

Jasmine was 27 years old, with short black hair, a generous sensual

nose which had so far evaded the current fed for cosmetic surgery (still

something ofa novelty in Canada), humorous dark eyes and wide inviting

mouth generously adorned with bright red lipstick. At least, Moore and

Croft seemed to find it inviting. They pestered her for a kiss.

Jasmine ate her last forkful of pie and demurred.

There must be something wrong with us,' pouted Croft His big

handsome face revealed dimples when he pouted. Jasmine had no doubt

he was fully aware of this feet

'How can she resist us hard-hitting young stockbroking types,'

lamented

Moore.

'Hard-drinking, more like it,' said Jasmine, pushing her plate aside. 'Any

girl who was crazy enough to get near you guys would have her eyelashes

singed by the alcohol fumes.'

'I've got breath mints,' said Croft hopefully.

'Kissing under the mistletoe comes but once a year,' added Moore.

Jasmine shook her head cheerfully. 'Sorry guys, it's not going to

happen.' The stockbrokers groaned. 'Anyway,' she grinned, 'it's plastic

mistletoe. That doesn't count.'

The bright green sprig of plastic hung by the big window, steamy with

condensation, that looked out onto the street. A small man in an expensive-

looking camel-hair coat was standing looking at the mistletoe with the

same kind of bemusement that Jasmine herself felt. This little green

artefact, probably manufactured in Japan by uncomprehending factory

workers, seemed somehow to sum up the commercialisation of Christmas

and a multitude of other paradoxes emblematic of this bewildering and

exciting decade, with its technical innovations which swept away the old

order. Stereophonic sound, the birth control pill, space travel...

As Jasmine thought the words 'space travel', the little man in the camel-

hair coat turned and smiled at her, as if she'd said something out loud, and

it had been funny.

'Come on Jazz, please,' whined Croft. 'Just one little smooch.'

Jasmine turned back to the stockbrokers and shook her head firmly. She

was not in principle against kissing, under the mistletoe or elsewhere,

but as a married woman she discouraged it with anyone except Shepherd,

her husband. She smiled as she rose from the table to a chorus of farther

groans and pleas for her to stay. She ignored all the entreaties of the young

men and picked up her purse.

'All right, leave us then,' said Moore.

'Go on, hurry back to the creepy Mormons,' said Croft. Seeing the look

of surprise on her face, he added, 'We saw them going up in the elevator.'

'They're not Mormons,' said Jasmine.

'Yes they are. Creepy matching his-and-hers Mormons.'

'They're some kind of austere Scandinavian sect,' said Jasmine.

'Austere and creepy,' said Croft.

'They dress like undertakers,' said Moore. 'Transylvanian undertakers.

Where is the festive spirit there?'

'They're our valued clients,' said Jasmine firmly, moving to go.

'Stay with us,' begged Croft. But Jasmine was already at the till, lining

up to pay for the delicious slab of pie and the glass of milk she had wolfed

down to line her stomach for the extensive drinking that was inevitably

to ensue at the office party. As she waited, she began for the first time to

feel the Christmas spirit Maybe it was the jolly poster of Santa Claus on

the wall behind the till. She noted with approval that it was a Blackstone

Beverages promotional poster. The Blackstone account - as represented by

the so called 'creepy Mormons' waiting back at the agency - was going to

pay for her big new house opposite the park on Avenue Road. There would

be new posters soon, featuring her own quirky, minimal cartoons rather

than the somewhat laboured airbrush illustration currently on display

- all snowmen, apple-red cheeks and perching robins. She recognised

Spackler's handiwork in those robins.

'Pecan pie and a glass of milk,' she said, coming to the front of the line,

handing the portly clerk in a white apron and red Santa hat three quarters.

'Keep the change.'

'Thank you ma'am. And happy Christmas.'

'Same to you. The pecan pie was delicious.'

'It was excellent, wasn't it?' said a voice behind her. Jasmine turned to

see the man in the camel-hair coat standing behind her. He had a nice face,

weathered and lined but reassuring, sort of. He peered at her, smiling.

There was something unusual about his eyes, almost disturbing in the

voracious enquiry of their gleaming intelligence.

'Yes, very nice,' she said and hurried out of the diner, the bell above

the door tinkling as she pushed through it into the cold air. Outside, the

wind off Lake Ontario hit her in the face with stinging force. Jasmine had

grown up in the wide prairies of western Alberta where, if anything, the

winters were even more severe. So December in Toronto normally held no

terrors for her. But there was something different this year. In the last day

or two, winter seemed to have arrived with an unprecedented savagery.

This morning Jasmine had woken to grey light coming through a window

pane completely covered by an eerie crystalline lattice of ice. Peering at

it sleepily, a cup of morning coffee steaming in her hand, the ice on the

window seemed to Jasmine to have formed a pattern, complex and cryptic

and somehow sinister. She had shivered then, and not just because the hot

air central heating in their building had broken down.

Jasmine remembered what the announcer on the radio had been saying

about the ice on Lake Ontario. It was weird. Like the city buses she

had

seen stalled in the streets that morning on the way to work. The buses

were stolid workhorses, designed to operate in the coldest of conditions

and winter-proofed down to the last rivet. Yet they'd sat unmoving in the

streets, like a pack of sad, doomed behemoths who'd given up the ghost,

causing chaos in the morning rush hour. Jasmine had ended up walking to

work, down city blocks of deserted store fronts. It seemed that half the city

had abandoned any attempt to get to work and open up for business. The

place had an eerie feeling. Clusters of long sharp icicles had formed on the

eaves of the city buildings, jagged and fang-like and threatening.

Jasmine had forced herself to shake off the grim mood then and she did

so again now, ignoring the charcoal sky, harsh wind and killing chill. It's

almost Christmas, she reminded herself. Cheer up!

She hummed a festive tune, told herself the icy air blowing into her face

was refreshing, and braced herself for the short walk back to the office. In

the distance, the KTBT building loomed, the television transmission mast

on its roof reaching high into the grey skies.

Jasmine had moved to Toronto almost ten years ago, seeking not

exactly

fame and fortune but rather the specifics of her dream of success as a

cartoonist and animator. Even at that early age she'd known her future

lay in advertising, and Toronto was the only city in Canada which offered

any real competition to the giants of Madison Avenue, looming some 350

miles to the south.

Jasmine had been right about needing to line her stomach. She'd only just

emerged from the sliding doors of the elevator on the twentieth floor when

the noise and heat of the party hit her like a physical force and someone

handed her a glass of fruit punch, heavily laced with Uncle Vlad's Imperial

Vodka - another account of Brockley and Campbell. Dave Brubeck was

playing on Mr Gimley's Revox reel-to-reel and a number of people were

dancing, including Debbie from accounting who was doing a kind of

drunken mambo which she would no doubt later have cause to regret.

The Christmas party was in full swing.

Ernie Spackler, a powerfully built man with a blond brush cut, was

showing off his golf stroke to the admiring gaze of the adoring secretaries.

Spackler, a square-jawed former war hero of what Jasmine deemed to be

seriously limited intelligence, was very popular with the secretaries.

On the other side of the room, fat, jolly little Edmond Dawlish had trapped someone in the corner and was deep in conversation with the stranger. Dawlish always did this at parties - grew owlishly philosophical and profound. Usually the person he trapped in the corner ended up not minding because, even drunk, Dawlish's conversation was fascinating.

'Honey.' Jasmine turned to see her husband, Shep Deering. He was a tall, skinny, bespectacled young man with freckles and an endearingly lopsided grin. His eyes still lit up when he saw her, especially when he'd had a few drinks, as he'd evidently had now. They kissed.

'Where's Caspar?' Their two-year-old son was a regular visitor to the office and Shep had brought him along to the party.

'I left him with Miriam. She's operating a kind of informal creche. There's half a dozen other ad brats in there, including the Forrest kids.'

'Ad brats?'

'The truly exceptional o f f s p r i n g of the sterling members of our profession.'

'Well I'd like to see my son right about now.'

'I'll go get him right away, honey,' said Shep, hurrying off.

'You've got him well trained,' said Mr Gimley. In the absence of Mr Brockley and Mr Campbell, who were on extended sabbaticals in the Bahamas and Spain respectively, Mr Gimley ran the company. He was a small, bearded man who always looked a little tired and a little amused.

'I know what you're thinking, but Shepherd likes me bossing him

around. He finds it comforting. It reminds him of his mother or something.

Speaking of motherhood, Caspar is here.'

'So I gather.'

'And I just had a sudden yen to see the little devil and Shep was a darling

and said he'd bring him through.'

Mr Gimley smiled. 'Miriam probably won't want to let him go. That

woman has an urge for motherhood which even a highly paid post as art

director here hasn't managed to fully sublimate.'

'Is that what we do with urges here, sublimate them?'

'Sublimate them or pander to them.' Gimley chuckled. 'Will you and

Shep come through to the conference room when you have a minute? The

clients want to say thank you to you for the new campaign.'

'Of course. Is it all right if we bring Caspar?'

'By all means.' Mr Gimley's eyes twinkled. 'Although Kristianna

Blackstone doesn't strike me as the motherly type.' He patted her on the

shoulder and moved off into the party throng to the sounds of 'God Rest

Ye Merry Gentlemen' being played by the Modern Jazz Quartet with Jimmy

Giuffre. Jasmine waited for her husband to return, watching Dawlish. He

was still in animated, drunken conversation with the stranger.

Jasmine got

close enough to listen to them.

The stranger said: 'Ever since the early part of this century, the Blackstone

soft drinks company has been working to achieve a change to the collective

psyche of the North American public. And they're continuing to do so with

your help. You've effectively become gatekeepers for the myth. If you say

Santa has seven reindeer, he has seven reindeer.'

'Correct,' said Dawlish. 'And if we say he has a mischievous little elf with

an eye patch for a sidekick, and his name is Jolnir, then he has one.'

'So is that what you're saying?' said the man, insistently. 'You're adding

Jolnir to the myth?'

'That's what our talented Jasmine is doing, her and her henpecked

copywriter of a husband. Jasmine, this is the Doctor.' Dawlish stepped

to one side and Jasmine got her first good look at the fellow he'd been

talking to. It was the little man from Gilchuck's, the one in the camel-hair

coat, although the coat was currently nowhere in evidence. He wore a pale

tweed jacket and a silk bow tie in an elaborate paisley design. He looked

like money and Jasmine guessed he must be a new client

'This is the Doctor,' said Dawlish.

'I know. I mean, we met earlier. In the diner.'

The Doctor nodded. 'We were discussing the merits of the pecan pie. But

we weren't properly introduced.' He extended his hand and Jasmine shook

it It was warm and dry and she felt a strange little racing of electricity at

his touch, as if he'd given her a shock. It was probably just static, off the

nylon fibres of the new office carpet

The drunken stockbrokers' description of the Blackstones as creepy

Mormons and Transylvanian undertakers was unfair, not least on the

Mormons and Transylvanian undertakers.

Tobias and Kristianna Blackstone, the sibling heirs to a massive soft

drinks fortune, were dressed in severe and sober black clothing, true, and

it was somewhat archaic. But it was also elegant and well-cut in a way that

suggested affluence.

Their black outfits made their narrow white faces look even more pale

and unhealthy. But their eyes burned with excitement and if Jasmine didn't

know better, she would have said they'd been drinking.

They jumped to their feet as Mr Gimley led Jasmine and her family into

the room. Bob Forrest, the account director and the man in charge of the

Blackstone campaign, remained sitting at the head of the long conference

table, his legs crossed at the ankles and propped up on its gleaming

mahogany surface. Mr Gimley settled down in an easy chair in a corner of

the room and relaxed with a sigh.

'Jasmine Deering, we are mightily pleased with your work on our

behalf,' announced Tobias Blackstone portentously.

'And also the efforts of your husband,' added Kristianna Blackstone.

They both spoke in a forced, wooden manner that suggested they didn't

have much experience in social situations. Jasmine imagined that they

spent most of their time shut away in their huge mansion in Ottawa,

getting up to God knew what.

'And here is a small token of our gratitude,' said Kristianna. She reached

into a large black leather Gladstone bag sitting on the floor while Tobias

smiled his fixed smile and said, 'A Christmas present for you.'

'A turkey from our farm.' Kristianna handed Jasmine a cold plastic bag

that had evidently recently emerged from a freezer. Through its frosted

surface Jasmine could see the plucked, mottled flesh of a big, dead bird. It

was very heavy and very cold. She handed the grisly thing to Shep, who set

it on the conference table.

'Thank you,' she said.

'No, it is we who should be thanking you.' Tobias nodded urgently.

'Ever since our family came to this country from Norway in 1897 we

have

laboured to achieve our goal. Now it is within our grasp.'

'Goal?' asked Shep.

'To make Blackstone and Christmas synonymous,' piped up Forrest

from the table. 'Everyone knows how the modern popular image of Santa

Claus, in red and white livery, was heavily promulgated in illustrations

for calendars to promote a certain brand of soft drinks. Blackstone saw

the possibilities and have been developing the image for their own brand.

The tropes of Santa's sleigh and reindeer, for instance, were at least partly

derived from Blackstone's pre-war advertising.'

'And then there's the turkeys,' said Kristianna hungrily.

'That's right.' Forrest swung his feet down off the table and lounged

back in his chair. 'Before Blackstone popularised the Christmas turkey,

people used to eat beef or ham...'

'But one cow or pig feeds many people.' Kristianna's eyes lit up.

'I see,' said Jasmine, although she didn't.

Tobias explained. 'She means that one cow or pig would die to feed many

people. But now every family must have a turkey. It is "all the rage".'

That's right.' Forrest went to the drinks cabinet and poured himself a

whiskey. Thanks to Blackstone, there's a turkey on every table.'

'So you see,' said Kristianna, eyes boring into Jasmine, 'many turkeys

must die to feed many people.'

'Uh... '

'Many, many small deaths.'

'That's right.' Forrest sipped his whiskey. 'Annual consumption of

Christmas turkeys means that something like a hundred million birds are

slaughtered every year.' He added a couple of ice cubes to his drink.

'A hundred million small deaths,' said Kristianna.

'Many deaths are better than a few deaths,' said Tobias.

Jasmine and her husband exchanged a look.

'I see that we have confused our friends, brother. We are simply saying it

constitutes a mighty sacrifice. All in honour of Jolnir.'

'What Miss Blackstone means,' said Forrest hastily, 'is that just like the

Christmas turkey, the introduction of Jolnir the mischievous elf in the

new Blackstone Christmas campaign is going to decisively change the

perceptions and habits of the entire buying public.'

'That's true,' intoned Tobias Blackstone. 'Great changes are coming.

Thanks to your efforts, Jolnir is the "talk of the town". He is everywhere

to be seen.'

Forrest cleared his throat. 'That's right And Jolnir dolls are this year's

must-have Christmas toy.' He opened a folder and flipped through some

charts. 'Three million sold here in Canada and an astounding nineteen

million in the United States.'

'All thanks to you and your animation,' said Tobias.

Jasmine looked at her husband. 'Well thank you, but Shep's songs had a lot to do with it, too.'

Forrest smiled. 'Of course, but Jasmine, your animation was a real breakthrough. You're one of a kind. Here at Brockley and Campbell we know a true gem when we've got one.'

Jasmine looked at the Blackstones. 'They like me because I'm minimal, which means cheap.' Everyone laughed, but it was true. Jasmine's cartoons consisted of simple drawings, crudely animated, like a child's flip-book. They were effective, and enormously popular but very inexpensive and quick to produce.

Tobias and Kristianna smiled and nodded. 'We greatly admire your techniques,' said the brother. 'We believe you've put us years ahead of our company plan. We did not expect to have achieved our goal for another 20 or 30 years. Now we must show our appreciation.' He reached into the Gladstone bag. Jasmine was wondering if there was another frozen turkey lurking in there, but instead Tobias brought out a fat wad of bank notes.

Mr Gimley, who had subsided somnolently into his chair roused himself at the sight of the money. 'Hey, whoa,' he said, getting up hastily.

'We wish to reward your employees,' said Kristianna.

'And you will.' Mr Gimley scooped up the currency and went to the safe

in the wall. 'But we don't like to throw cash around.' He opened the safe

and stowed the bank notes inside. 'We'll cut a cheque for Jasmine and

Shep as soon as the banks open. That's all right with you, Jazz, isn't it?' He

closed the safe and spun the dial.

'Of course,' said Jasmine, trying to estimate how much money had just

been stowed and factoring it into purchases for the new house.

'Well I'm going to take mine in cash,' said Forrest, 'if you don't mind.'

'And here you are, Mr Forrest,' said Tobias Blackstone. He reached into

the Gladstone and took out a leather pouch. He set it on the table with a

jingling sound.

'What the hell's that?' said Mr Gimley, his eyes narrowing. Tobias

loosened the drawstring on the pouch and revealed inside the warm gleam

of gold coins.

'Gold?' said Mr Gimley.

'Ah yes,' said Forrest, picking up the pouch and holding it possessively.

'Much safer than paper money.'

'Safer?' said Gimley.

'Ah, in terms of the international money markets. Well if you don't

mind, I've got to be going now.'

Mr Gimley chuckled and turned to Jasmine. 'You wouldn't believe how

this joker's making his Christmas getaway.'

Most of the party guests came onto the rooftop to witness the helicopter

landing. It descended from the darkening skies, carefully avoiding the

towering TV transmission antenna belonging to KTBT, the television

station that occupied the top floors of the building.

The helicopter settled on the snowy roof and Forrest ushered his wife

and lads on board. 'He seems to be in an awful hurry, doesn't he?' said a

voice at Jasmine's shoulder. She turned to see the Doctor smiling at her.

He was wearing his camel-hair coat and a straw hat which couldn't have

done much to ward off the cold.

'I guess he wants to rush to his country house for Christmas,' said

Jasmine. Forrest and his family bundled into the helicopter and waved to

the watching crowd. A cheer went up and people lifted their drinks in toast

as the helicopter rotors started to spin.

'He looks more like a man who is rushing *away* from something,' said

the Doctor, raising his voice to make himself heard over the sound of the

rotors. The helicopter rose into the sky, gingerly skirting the transmission

mast and then dipping and swooping away over the rooftops of downtown

Toronto. As it receded, large, fat flakes of snow began to fall, muffling the

sounds of its engine.

The festive crowd on the rooftop fell silent. The night seemed strangely

cold and black and empty. As if they were lost in some polar wilderness

instead of at the heart of one of the great cities of North America.

Jasmine looked upwards. An odd, icy mist hung in the sky, obscuring the

stars. As she looked up, she felt the snow on her face, caressing her cheek.

Feather-soft and cold, like the eerie touch of winter personified.

The snow started to come thick and fast, blanketing everything.

'Hey, would you look at that?' said Ernie Spackler. 'Looks like they got

out just in time.'

Back down in the office, the Christmas party continued unabated. Johnny

Mathis was singing carols on the reel-to-reel and everyone was drinking

eggnog. Shep had to take Caspar into the men's room to change his diaper

and Jasmine was waiting for his return when she felt a cold hand on her

shoulder. Kristianna and Tobias were standing there with their outdoor

coats on.

'You will excuse us,' said Kristianna.

'Of course,' said Jasmine.

Ernie Spackler lurched over, more than a little inebriated. 'Not staying

for the party?' he said.

'No,' said Tobias. 'We must finish moving the black stone.' He gestured at the window and Jasmine and Spackler peered down into the snow-covered street 20 floors below. There was a long, flatbed truck with a large, gnarled block of stone in the rear. It was a jagged fragment of rock resembling a giant version o f a Neolithic hand axe. It was about four feet wide and 20 feet long and a deep, glassy shade of obsidian.

Spackler shook his head in amusement. 'All these years I've been working on the Blackstone account and I didn't realise there actually was a Black Stone.'

'The stone came from the old world with us. Now it shall be the focal point for the imminent gathering.'

'What's that,' said Spackler, 'a Christmas party?'

'Where are you moving it to?' said Jasmine.

'Onto the ice on the lake.'

'Is the ice on the lake thick enough to support something that big?'

Suddenly a cry went up from the crowd and Mr Gimley and his secretary entered the room, wheeling a large television set on castors. He waved at Jasmine. Tour new spot is going out! Get the champagne ready!' He switched on the television and wrestled happily with the controls, trying to get a stable picture. 'You'd think we'd be able to get decent reception,' he said, 'with the TV station just upstairs.'

Everyone laughed, except Jasmine. She was beginning to feel strange

and light-headed. She saw the Blackstones leaving and felt an odd sinking

feeling, as though it was suddenly too late. Though too late for what, she

couldn't say.

As the champagne corks began to pop, she fled through the nearest

door, looking for refuge. She found herself in the cool darkness of a store

room. Normally the shelves on its walls were full of stationery but, as her

eyes adjusted to the dimness she realised that the place had now been given

over to storage of the complimentary Jolnir dolls. Their elfin countenances

grinned at her from inside their cellophane wrappers, each one with its

sinister, black eye patch and single, glass eye gleaming. The dolls were

based on Jasmine's design. You could say they were her creations. But she

felt no pride in looking at them. Only a cold, lonely emptiness.

'Sinister-looking things, aren't they?'

Jasmine almost jumped out of her skin. She hadn't seen the little

man in the room with her. The Doctor. 'What are you doing here?' she

demanded.

'I might well ask you the same question.'

'I needed to get away from the party for a minute.'

'And I needed to take a look at the enemy.' The Doctor inspected the

ranks of dolls in their Christmas wrapping, sitting on the shelves.

'Enemy? What do you -'

The door clicked open and the fluorescent ceiling lights flickered into livid life, illuminating the room with a cold glare. 'Hope I'm not interrupting anything naughty!' Ernie Spackler stood in the doorway.

'No,' said *the* Doctor coolly. 'I was just about to explain the gravity of the situation to Mrs Deering.'

'What gravity?' said Spackler, stepping into the room and closing the door. 'What situation?'

The Doctor turned to Jasmine. 'Your advertising campaign is the final stage in a carefully orchestrated plot. Unwittingly you have helped the Blackstone family unleash catastrophic and evil forces.' He paused for what Jasmine imagined was dramatic e f f e c t

'Their intention is to create belief in their version of the Santa Claus legend. One that showcases an alien entity, a being from another world.'

Jasmine and Spackler stared. 'From another world?' echoed Jasmine.

'A creature stranded here millennia ago, after its ship crashed. A creature called the Jolnir.'

'Oh, no, hey,' said Spackler. 'Now wait a minute. Jasmine here and her hubby were the ones who came up with the whole notion of Jolnir.'

'Did they?' said the little man, looking at Jasmine.

She shook her head. 'Actually the brief came from the client. The Blackstones. They gave us the name Jolnir and a description. The eye

patch

for instance.'

'Just like Odin,' said the man.

'Odin?'

'In pagan times, the Jolnir was worshipped as the norse god, Odin. The

Jolnir gains energy from belief; from the collective electrochemical activity

of human brains that are focused on his image.'

'Urn...' Jasmine tried to interrupt, but the Doctor carried on smoothly.

'When belief in the Jolnir ebbed, he became dormant, kept alive only by

the belief of his core believers.'

'The Blackstone family?' said Spackler.

The Blackstone family, immigrants from Scandinavia, were the last,

true believers. It has been their mission to bring the Jolnir back to life

- by providing him with mass belief. One key element in this has been the

annual mass slaughter of wildfowl... '

'The turkeys,' said Jasmine. 'Kristianna called them a sacrifice.'

'Exactly,' said the Doctor. 'The negative energy created by the mass fear

and death of so many creatures is an important element of their plan.'

Spackler frowned. 'What about that black stone they've got in the back

of that truck?'

'That was originally a component of the Jolnir's spacecraft. It has a

crystalline structure which enables it to focus energy. Psychic energy.'

'They said something about setting it up on the lake.'

'An ideal position for it, on a massive sheet of ice crystals, here at the heart of the continent.'

'And the lake has completely frozen over,' said Jasmine.

'Exactly,' said the Doctor. 'Now with the crystal in position, the annual sacrifice of millions of living creatures, the perfectly tailored psychic image of Santa Claus, and the addition of Jolnir to the mix as Santa's trusted assistant, all the elements in their conspiracy are in place, allowing for the psyche of the masses to be subverted.' He looked at Jasmine. 'Thanks to the final push from your advertising campaign, the cartoons on television and these dolls being given to children -' he indicated the rows of toys sitting on the shelves staring down at them in ghoulish silence. 'Thanks to all that, the Blackstones are about to succeed on a catastrophic scale.'

'So I'm an accomplice to all this?' said Jasmine.

'Only an unwitting one. Unlike Forrest, who knew all about it. Which is why he fled with his family in the helicopter. Before it happens.'

'Before what happens?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'A critical mass is going to be achieved, so to speak. The conditions of belief will be perfect, allowing the Jolnir to return to Earth in his full strength, with devastating consequences for humanity.'

'What sort of consequences?' persisted Jasmine.

'A reversion of the world to a ruthless primal place where blood will be

spilled by roaming bands of human beasts. A reign of terror until Jolnir

has his way and rules a barren, wild planet with a tiny nucleus of acolytes,

and a substantial army of slaves.' The Doctor spoke these words in *the*

manner of a man accustomed to saying many similar things in the past.

'We have to stop them,' said Spackler.

The Doctor nodded, but he was looking at Jasmine. 'I need your help.'

'Of course,' said Jasmine. 'Just wait here a minute for me, please.' She

stepped out of the small room, back into the festive noise and warmth of

the party, closing the door on the two men behind her. Sinatra was now

singing Christmas songs on the reel-to-reel and eggnog had given way to

champagne. Moving quickly through the crowd she found Shep sitting at

his desk with Caspar playing on the blotter. 'Get your coat,' said Jasmine.

Shep looked up at her in surprise. 'Why?'

'Because we're getting out of here before the raving madman I left shut

up in the stock room with Spackler realises that I've ditched him.'

'I can't believe that Spackler was actually buying the nonsense this nutcase

was spouting.'

'Maybe he just didn't want to be rude to a client.'

'No. He actually believed it. And was that Doctor character a client? I don't

think so. I think he was just some crazy guy who wandered in off the street.

Maybe he followed me back from the diner. Like a stray dog.'

Jasmine peered about her. The snow had stopped, but during the short

time it had fallen it had covered the streets to a preposterous depth. Three

or four feet in places. The city had lost its identity, its sharp angles buried

in soft contours of white.

Humped mounds indicated places where cars had been parked.

Streetlamps and traffic lights had had their sharp outlines blurred and

softened by a white clinging growth of snow. All evidence of the city had

been buried or disguised. It was as if civilisation was vanishing.

Jasmine had planned to take her family home in a taxi. But there was no

way a taxi could move down these streets. 'Where are the snow ploughs?'

'Where are the people?' responded Shep. He was carrying Caspar,

wrapped up snugly in his snowsuit. Their feet crunched through the snow,

moving across a blank white landscape in the empty night Jasmine looked

around. Shep was right. The streets were empty. The only sound was their

footsteps and the thin howling of the wind around the tall buildings.

The howling rose and fell, causing the hairs to stir on the back of

Jasmine's neck. She reminded herself that she was in the middle of a

modern city, not some desolate, wild place. She kept reminding herself

of that as they trudged slowly homeward, as the howling grew louder

and nearer... She kept reminding herself right up to the moment when it

became clear that the howling wasn't the wind at all.

The wind was blowing, all right, cold and fierce. But it wasn't the source

of the sound. 'It's wolves,' whispered Shep, holding Caspar close to him.

But the howling wasn't wolves either. Jasmine wished it had been.

The howling came from human beings.

A group of men who came running out of the shadows of an alley way,

slashing through a snow drift, moving as swiftly as any pack of lithe,

feral beasts. They trotted out in front of Jasmine and her family and stood

confronting them. The men all wore business suits. Some wore coats. A

few wore hats. But even the most lightly clad didn't seem to feel the wind

or the biting cold. Their hot breath fogged on the cold air. They stood and

stared at Jasmine and Shep and the baby.

There was something strange about their faces. Something in their

expressions and their eyes. That was why Jasmine didn't recognise them at

first. She only gradually realised that it was Moore and Croft and the other

stockbrokers from the eighteenth floor.

Jasmine should have felt relieved when she recognised them. But she

didn't. She cleared her throat and said, tentatively, 'Hello, guys.'

The noise they made in reply was a guttural snarling. They responded as

a group. As a group they began to close in.

Jasmine moved closer to Shep. Together they tried to shield Caspar from

whatever was to come. 'What do you want?' she cried.

'There's no point talking to them. They're no longer human.' Jasmine

spun around to see the Doctor standing in the snow behind them. He

was wearing his camel-hair coat and, startlingly, a pair of snow shoes on

which he'd evidently managed to follow them, swiftly and silently, from

the KTBT building.

When the stockbrokers saw the Doctor they paused for a moment

and their chorus of snarling bubbled viciously louder. Then they moved

forward again.

'No longer human,' repeated the Doctor, unbuttoning his coat 'But

they still have vivid memories of what meant the most to them when they

w e r e human.' He took something out of his inside pocket As he opened

his hand Jasmine saw that it was a thick wad of banknotes. The

Doctor

stripped the bank wrapper off it and fed the notes to the wind, sending

them blowing down the street

When the men in the pack saw the money flying past them, they turned

and pursued it, howling.

'That should keep them occupied for a while.' The Doctor smiled and

beckoned to Jasmine and Shep. 'You'd better come back to the party. It's

much the safest place.' They fell into step behind him as he started back

towards the KTBT building. Jasmine had a hundred questions, but she

only asked one.

'Where did you get the money?'

'From the safe in your boardroom.

'You cracked our safe?'

'Yes.' The Doctor shrugged modestly. 'It was a simple three-disc rotary

combination lock.'

As soon as they got back to the office, the Doctor told Jasmine and Shep

what to do, and they set to work. Within a few hours they had a rough

version of the new advertisement finished. It was a very short ad, and fairly

crude looking. But that was in keeping with all the other television spots

they had created for Blackstone. The strength of Jasmine's animation had

always been in its simplicity.

The Doctor nodded with approval, but his eyes were grim. 'Now we must convince the television people to broadcast the ad.' As he headed upstairs, Jasmine and Shep followed him in trepidation, carrying their presentation art.

The senior staff at KTBT were all still in the building. Like Brockley and Campbell they had stayed late for their Christmas party. And like the people at Brockley and Campbell, an awareness of the menacing events unfolding in the frozen city outside had begun to sober them up.

But they refused point blank to run the ad.

The Doctor tried to sway them. He was by turns charming, persuasive, commanding, intimidating and downright scary. But the television people refused to budge. It wasn't just a matter of money. Issues of autonomy and copyright came into it. But that wasn't the crucial thing. The crucial thing, Jasmine realised, was that they just didn't believe.

They were in their third hour of arguing when the door was flung open and Spackler came hurrying in. 'Doctor! Thank God I found you.'

He sank in a chair, and looked up at them red eyed and haggard. There was a corner of a bloodstained bandage jutting out from under the open collar of his shirt. He rubbed the bandage and said, 'You've got to help

us

before it's too late. As soon as you told us about this Jolnir thing and the

black stone, I knew what we had to do. I got hold of everybody I knew who

had a hunting rifle and could shoot straight.'

It seemed to Jasmine that the Doctor winced at the mention of guns,

but he remained silent as Spackler related his story. 'I enlisted a gang of

my old army cronies and hunting buddies. We got our hands on a truck

and drove it out onto the ice and found them out there, surrounding the

stone, protecting it. They had guns too, but I thought we'd be pretty evenly

matched.' Spackler shook his head. 'It wasn't like that.'

'What was it like?' said the Doctor quietly.

'When we tried to fire at them, our guns wouldn't work. They jammed.

They were frozen solid. It didn't make any sense. Gun oil doesn't freeze

like that, and we'd kept them in the truck with us. They weren't exposed to

the cold. But that wasn't the worst thing...'

'No ,' said the Doctor.

'The worst thing was their guns. Their guns worked fine.'

'Yes,' said Doctor. 'Their power is growing. They have selective control

over the cold and how it affects things. Things like your weapons.'

'They cut us to pieces.' Spackler shuddered. 'We had to turn and run.

Back across the ice. Our truck was hit. It was burning. We just left it there.'

He rose to his feet and went to the window of the conference room. The

KTBT staffers rose and followed him. They stared out the picture window

over the dark city towards the lake. There a small orange ball of flame

could be seen burning in the distance. Then all at once it went out, leaving

only blackness. A wolf howl rose from the streets below.

The KTBT people looked at each other.

Once the television people agreed to broadcast the ad, things moved very

quickly. As the morning sun rose over the silent, snow-buried city, the first

transmissions began.

So it was that on Christmas Eve, millions of viewers saw an amusing

new, animated cartoon of the annoying little elf Jolnir and Santa Claus

indulging in their usual knockabout comedy. This time, though, there was

a sinister edge to the routine, with Jolnir eventually trying to shut Santa in

a refrigerator (which appeared, with the surreal logic of such cartoons, in

the middle of a snowy wasteland). But Santa popped back out of the fridge,

brandishing a Christmas turkey and proceeded to pound Jolnir into the

ground with it. The irritating little elf ended up thoroughly squashed

by

the frozen turkey.

Finally, Jolnir disappeared altogether in a puff of smoke that was

evidently foul smelling (Santa sniffed and grimaced). And as soon as

Jolnir disappeared, the snowy landscape melted away to reveal a field of

sprouting flowers, coloured in with great haste by Jasmine.

The ad proved enormously popular, striking an immediate chord with

the people of North America, who had been staring out their windows at

a landscape gone suddenly strange and wild and ancient. Everybody knew

that something was badly wrong, and even if they could not articulate it,

they were looking for a way to put it right.

So people responded to the message of the ad, laughing at the cartoon,

and most importantly laughing at Jolnir. The ad was picked up by the

US networks - all three of them - and was shown around the clock and,

unusually, without charge (perhaps the most remarkable part of the chain

of events set in motion by the Doctor).

By sundown that night, the arctic weather conditions abated. The freak

ice that had formed on Lake Ontario, and the rest of the Great Lakes,

freezing this great body of water solid to an unprecedented depth, melted

as quickly as it had come, causing members of an odd religious sect

and

their large stone monolith to abruptly plunge into dark foaming oblivion.

And across the entire continent there were reports the next day of

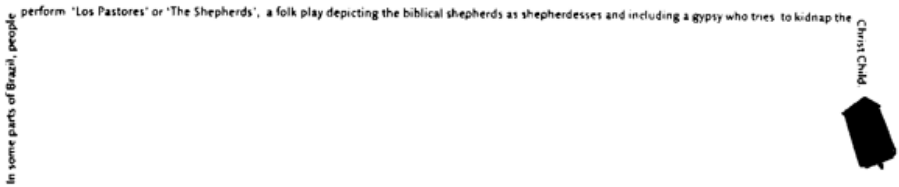
children waking up on Christmas morning and tearing their Jolnir dolls

to pieces.

But no one seemed to mind. And, like so many Christmas toys before,

by the time its fragments were consigned to the trash, it was already

forgotten.


In some parts of Brazil, people perform 'Los Pastores' or 'The Shepherds', a folk play depicting the biblical shepherds as shepherdesses and including a gypsy who tries to kidnap the Christ Child

Brazil 2672

Companion

James Moran

An adventure of the Eighth Doctor

My name is Yarah de Silva. Yarah means 'water lady'. My teacher told me

that at school, but my dad always said it means 'Amazonian warrior'. I

think my dad was making that up. But it sounds cooler, so I've decided to

believe him and not my teacher.

I live in a small town called Avelar, in Brazil. It is the year 2672. I am 11

years, 4 months and 2 days old. I am a girl. When I grow up, I am going to

be a famous astronaut, and I will fly into space and meet aliens and make

friends with them. When I was very small, a boy pushed me over at school

and said that girls were too stupid to be astronauts. When my dad found

out, he told me that girls were not stupid at all, and that the only people

who were really stupid were the ones who went around pushing people

over and making them feel bad. Then my dad went to the school, found

the boy, and told him that if he ever hurt me again, he'd put him into a very

small bottle. Like a ship in a bottle. And then he'd put that bottle in his

shed, along with all the other bottles full of all the other naughty kids

he'd

done the same thing to. The boy was too scared to even look at me after

that. He is silly. My dad doesn't even have a shed.

I am allergic to animals. That means that if I go near any kind of animal,

I get really sick. One time I saw a cat in the garden, so I went out and

petted it. I felt okay for an hour, but then I couldn't breathe, and woke up

in hospital. I can't touch animals, I can't go near them, and I definitely

can't have a pet. Not even a goldfish. We tried one of those, but it made me

just as sick as the cat did. Some people are allergic to cats, but not fish. Or

fish, but not cats. I'm allergic to all of them, any kind of animal at all. The

doctors don't know why. They say I'll be fine and have a perfectly normal

life, as long as I stay away from animals.

But I really, *really,* ***really*** want a little puppy dog.

Every Christmas I ask for a puppy. Every Christmas, my dad tells me

that I can't have one, and he gets me another stuffed toy and some other

games and sweets and books. I love the presents he gets me. He always

knows what I like. But he can never get me the thing that I want more than

anything, because it'll make me sick.

Instead, I draw lots of pictures of puppies, which is as close as I can

get

to the real thing. Most of my drawings are the same because I'm trying to

figure out what the perfect puppy would look like. I would call him Patch.

He should be black and white, with a sort of pale patch on one side of his

nose, and two white paws, like socks. He should have one wonky ear and

one normal one. He should be a bit messy, a bit clumsy, like the sort of

dog that sits in his own water bowl by accident, then can't figure out what

happened, but he doesn't care cause he's having such a brilliant time just

being here. And, most importantly, he should love me. That would be the

most perfect puppy in the world. I draw lots of pictures of him. Sometimes

I take the pictures for a walk. People laugh at me, but I don't care.

My mother went away when I was four. I don't remember her much.

My dad says she is a superspy for the government, and had to go off on a

really important, top secret mission, maybe for years and years. He says

we should both be really proud of her. I can tell he is very proud because

he always gets really quiet when he talks about her. I hope she finishes her

secret mission one day, so she can come back home.

The people on the news keep saying there's going to be a war with Russia. Or maybe China. I'm not sure. Some big country, anyway. I get scared when they go on about it, but my dad says not to worry because he can keep me safe. He should know, because he works for Positron Incorporated, and they make the robot soldiers that the army uses. He says our robot soldiers are better than anyone else's, so there's nothing to worry about. I know it's okay because he's the cleverest person in the whole wide world. He's the head of robotics at the company, so he must know what he's talking about. He's been very busy lately, because of all the war stuff going on. They've been making more robot soldiers than usual. Bigger and better ones, and not just soldiers - robot guns and robot planes, and special thinking machines that can work out how to beat the other side properly. My dad explained how it worked one time, but I didn't really understand. Something about fuzzy pathways and organic chess. Or maybe it was organic pathways and fuzzy chess? I don't know. Something was fuzzy, anyway.

One time, he took me to work to show me how they made everything and it was really good fun. We saw the machine that makes the robot soldiers, and dad showed me the little brains before they went in their

heads. Funny how something so small can have your whole mind inside.

My dad said that it was the same for people - we have a lump of grey stuff

in our heads, and that does all the thinking. Only ours is called the Brain,

and the robot soldier brain is called something else. It was five or six really,

really long words so I just call them Robot Brains. Dad said they'd made a

big breakthrough in how they think about thinking, and how robots think,

and it meant they could make them even more clever. One day, he said,

they'd be even cleverer than us. (Not him, obviously. Nobody's as clever

as my dad.)

When he showed me around, there were some tourists there too, in a

big group. I wasn't with them because I was getting a special tour from

my dad. But they all looked at us when the tour guide pointed to my dad

and told them what his job was. And they all went 'Ooooh!' because my

dad is very important at the factory. They all stared at him, except for one

man in the group. He looked at me instead, and smiled and waved so I

waved back. He seemed nice, and looked quite funny. He had long hair,

and a waistcoat and a really strange jacket. The tour guide started going

on about the metals they use in the robots, and the funny man looked at

me again and yawned really loudly. The tour guide was cross, because he

was in the middle of his speech. But, the funny man gave him an innocent

look, and pointed at someone else, which made me giggle. When the

tour guide turned around again, the funny man winked at me. The group

moved on to look at something else, and he went with them. Then my dad

took me for an ice cream and we went home.

At Christmas, I asked for a puppy again, as usual. But this time my dad

said he was planning a surprise for me. A really cool surprise. He had been

working late at the factory every day for weeks, which I thought maybe was

something to do with the war and the soldiers. But it wasn't. On Christmas

morning, I ran downstairs, and in the middle of the other presents, was a

special box. My dad looked at me and his voice was very serious.

'Now you have to promise me something,' he said. 'Promise you won't

tell anyone where it came from, or I might get in a lot of trouble. And you

have to promise to be very careful with it, because it cost a lot of money.'

'I promise,' I said. I was excited and scared at the same time, and I ran

over to the box and opened it.

Inside, was a ***puppy***.

But not a normal puppy, not one that would make me sick. It was a little

robot puppy. It was about half my size - like one those dogs that look

like horses, but it was shiny and silver. And when I said hello, it made a

robotic barking noise, like those joke doorbells you can get. It jumped

out, ran over to me, and lifted up its front paw to shake hands. I couldn't

believe it - it was the best present ever! So I hugged my dad really tightly,

nearly knocking him over. He laughed, which was really nice, because he

hadn't laughed for ages and ages. He's such a serious man, sometimes. He

watches the news every day, if you can believe that.

Then the robot puppy ran to the door, and barked again.

'What's it doing?' I asked.

'Well, I'm no dog expert,' said my dad. 'But I'd say it wants to go for

a walk.' So I took it for a walk around the garden. My dad followed us

closely, making notes on a clipboard.

'It's based on something new we've been working on,' he said. 'Robot

scouts that crawl over battlefields checking for mines.'

'What do they do when they find a mine?' I asked.

He thought for a minute. 'Well, they make the mine safe.'

'That's nice of them,' I said. 'How did you make the puppy?'

'I adapted one of the scouts, made it dog-shaped, then installed some

dog-programming. We usually scan human brain patterns so the robot

soldiers can think more like us. But I scanned the brain patterns of a dog,

and made the robot think like a real one. Mostly. Some things it can't do,

obviously.'

'Like eat,' I said.

'That's right, it can't eat.'

'Or do a wee.'

'That's right.'

'Or fall in love with another puppy.'

'No, it can't do those things. It can run around, play fetch, and protect

you, just like a real dog. But it will never make you sick. It's got our latest

AI chip, and is the cleverest robot we've made so far. It can learn what you

like to do, and adapt itself accordingly. I've programmed it to be loyal to

you, so it will always be your friend.'

'Can it run faster than me?'

'I don't know. Why don't you try it and find out?'

So I ran off, shouting at the robot puppy to come with me. It raced after

me, really fast, bouncing around and barking. My dad laughed as we ran

around the garden, but then I tripped over a rose bush. I cut my knee a little

bit, and had to have a plaster but it didn't hurt that much. And the

whole

time, the robot puppy stayed with me, making sure I was safe, and walking

in front of me in case there was anything else to trip over.

After I'd had a rest, I came downstairs and found my dad on the phone to

the garden centre. The robot puppy had gone out and stamped on the rose

bush that tripped me up. Then it dug it out of the ground, and stuffed it in

the bin. It was trying to protect me, I suppose. But my dad had to get a new

rose bush delivered, so he was quite annoyed. It was funny though.

The next morning, we woke up and found that the puppy had dug up

all of the flowers and plants in the whole garden, and put them by the bin

- just in case they tripped me up.

So I decided to call him Digger.

Over the next few weeks, me and Digger went for lots of walks, and a lot of

plants got dug up in the garden. My dad gave up trying to replant them. He

said as long as I was happy he didn't mind, but he wasn't too pleased with

the mess. He said it looked like their minefield testing ground. I asked

why their minefield ground looked like that if the scouts made the mines

all safe? He sort of coughed into his tea, and said he just meant it was a

very messy place. Then he changed the subject I hope he's not fibbing

about the robot scouts. I hope nothing bad happens to them. I would have

something to say about that

The week after that, my dad got people in to concrete all over the

gardens, because he said it was an 'eyesore' which means it was a great big

dirty mess. Me and Digger watched from the upstairs window as they laid

the concrete, and flattened it out Once it was ready, they fused it dry with

their special electrical thingy, and it was ready to walk on right away.

Me and Digger ran out to go for another walk. Digger loved going for

walks. We ended up chasing each other again, around and around until I

got dizzy. Digger never got dizzy, he probably had some special robot and-

dizzifying thing built in - which I think is cheating, really. While we were

running around, I slipped on the concrete, and fell over again, hurting

my elbow this time. It wasn't too bad, just a scrape from the concrete.

But Digger ran to the part of the garden where I'd fallen, and stamped

on it. He was trying to dig it up but it was solid concrete, so he couldn't

do it. He seemed a bit upset about that, and was quiet for the rest of the

day. He must have been sad that he couldn't make it safe for me. But you

can't make the whole world safe for everyone, unless you wrap all the

dangerous bits in bubble wrap, and that would probably hurt your ears

with the popping noises everywhere you went. Anyway, you wouldn't be

able to bubble wrap over the sea. Unless you had a really, really, really big

roll of bubble wrap.

That night, I woke up, and Digger was gone. I was worried that something

might have happened to him, and went to tell my dad. His hair was

sticking up all weird, and he wasn't really awake.

'Go back to sleep,' he said. 'He's probably just gone for a walk. I

programmed him to be loyal so he would never leave you.'

'But what if he's hurt?'

'He can't be hurt, he's made of reinforced Rigidium, which I invented.

Remember I told you how strong that was?'

'Yes.'

'Well, there you are then.'

And he tried to go back to sleep, but then the Siren went off. That meant

something very bad was happening at work. He looked at me and I looked

at him. And somehow we both knew that Digger was involved.

We got to the factory and heard all sorts of strange noises. I had made dad

bring me along, because I was worried, and said it would be quicker just

to bring me, rather than stand around wasting time trying to convince

me

not to come. He looked at me, and said I sounded like my mother. I said

thank you, but I don't think he meant it in a good way.

The main gate at the factory had a large hole in it, and people were

scrambling around panicking. We went into the main factory assembly

area, and one of the workers came running over to my dad.

'It's broken into the mobile weaponry section,' he said. 'What does it

want?'

My dad sighed. He knew who 'it' was, just from looking at the hole in

the gate. 'It wants to dig up our garden.'

'It what?' asked the worker, but my dad didn't answer, and kept walking

further inside. I followed him, a bit scared and a bit excited by all the noise

and madness.

We stopped outside a large door with a sign that said 'Advanced

Weaponry Prototypes'. There was another big hole in the door, and next

to it was an abandoned JCB, one of those big, yellow truck things with a

metal bucket arm. I knew what had happened. Digger had tried to get in

the main factory gates, but he wasn't strong enough. So Digger had got

himself a digger.

'I didn't know Digger could drive,' I said.

'He's not supposed to be able to,' said my dad, looking worried.

'Yes, but he's clever, isn't he? He can learn things. You told me that,

silly.'

I was hoping he'd laugh, but he just frowned, and paced up and down for

a bit He made me wait outside the gate, while he went inside to see what

was going on. I waited for a few minutes. But when I heard explosions and

screaming, I ran inside. I didn't want anything bad to happen to my dad.

It took me a while to find him. He was hiding behind a Blast Testing

Shield because Digger was throwing things around.

At one end of the room, there was a special cage with a really big robot

soldier inside, which was the size of a house. It looked a bit like a frog

standing up. Only a really, *really,* ***really*** big frog. Made of metal. With guns and missiles on its arms. There was a row of robot soldiers stacked up like

toys against the wall. Digger was trying to break open the cage, using one

of the robot soldier guns, and that's what was causing the explosions and

sparks. My dad shouted when he saw me come in.

'Yarah! I told you not to come in here, get out, it's not safe!'

'I wanted to make sure you were okay.'

'Oh, sweetheart, that's very good of you, but it's too dangerous. Digger's

trying to get our new prototype.' (He meant the Frog Robot) 'We have to

figure out how to stop him.'

'Why does he want it?'

'I don't know. At first, I thought he just wanted to dig up the concrete in

the garden, to make it safe for you. But this is something else. Now I think

he's gone mad.'

And that's when the funny man suddenly ran over to us. It was the same

man with the strange jacket that I'd seen in the tour group. The one that

winked at me. He winked at me again, and waved at my dad. We couldn't

see where he had come from, but he must have been there the whole

time.

'Not mad, exactly,' said the funny man. 'He's still got that military

programming, hasn't he?' He was such a friendly-looking man, you just

had to answer him.

'Yes,' said my dad. 'But only a basic version. Self protection, loyalty,

checking for safety, watching over its owners, and so on.'

'Ah. Well there's your problem. It's so obsessed with protecting its owner

that it's making sure it can protect her against anything and everything.

It's those new AI brains you developed, they're where the trouble starts. I

mean - brilliant design - they do exactly what you intended, learning faster

than any other brain before - but it's too much for them.'

He unscrewed the control panel behind the blast shield, and pulled

out about a million multicoloured wires. He peeled the plastic off some,

and started crossing them all over, so quickly I couldn't see what he was

doing.

That's the flaw, you see. These brains learn so fast, they can't process

the knowledge quickly enough. They can't see both sides of the story, and

it all goes...'

I'm not sure quite what the next bit was, but it was very long and

complicated. I borrowed the security tape from that night, so I could write

down what he said properly, but it still sounded like gobbledegook. My

dad tried to explain it to me, which confused me even more. In the end, I

looked up the words in the Dictionary. What he meant was they just go a

bit wrong in the head. I don't know why he couldn't have just said that in

the first place.

'Which is why,' continued the funny man, 'it is trying to fuse itself to

that Heavily Armed Combat Chassis.' (He meant the Frog Robot, too.) 'So

it can use it to destroy any threats to young Yarah. Unfortunately, everything

in the world might be a threat to her. So it's going to have to destroy

it all.

Everything in the world. Bit by bit'

My dad looked at him. It was only then that he seemed to realise how

strange the whole situation was. 'Who are you?'

'Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm the Doctor. Always forgetting that part. I usually

turn up when things are going a bit haywire. Hello!'

'How do we stop it?'

The Doctor kept fiddling with the wires. 'I need to send out a shutdown

signal - a complex looped instruction that will lock the brain into one

single thought Sort of a paradox, a riddle, which it can't think its way out

of. You know, which came first, the chicken or the egg, that sort of thing,

but more complex obviously. Then it'll overload, and short itself out'

'Will it kill Digger?'I said.

The Doctor looked sad. 'I'm afraid so,' he said. 'Otherwise he's going to

try to kill everyone in the world.'

'What about the other AI brains in the building?' said my dad.

'Sorry,' said the Doctor. 'They'll be taken out too. Has to be done, I'm

afraid. Don't worry about the war - the same thing just happened to the

other side. They must have been working along similar lines. Luckily I got

to them before anything went wrong. Well, before anything went too badly

wrong. I mean, that whole area of the city needed rebuilding anyway...

There, that should do it.'

And suddenly, he jammed two more wires together. There was a really

loud hum, and a blinding flash, and all the robots in the factory stopped

what they were doing, including Digger. They staggered around for a

bit, and then sat down. You could almost hear their brains whirring and

grinding slowly down.

I ran over to Digger. He wasn't dangerous any more. Just a silly looking

robot puppy who was about to die. I sat with him until the end. The Doctor

told me he wouldn't feel any pain, that it was just like a machine being

switched off, but that just made it worse. I started crying then. I know

Digger tore the factory apart (and killed some people, I think, but dad

wouldn't say) but he was just trying to be a good puppy and protect me.

For a while, anyway, he was my best friend.

After it was all over, I asked my dad if we could bury Digger in the back

garden. We gave him a proper send off, and got a really nice memorial

statue to mark where he was. That way he could always watch over me.

A few weeks went by, and I was starting to get used to the idea that I

could never, ever have a real pet. I was upset about it, but it could have been

a lot worse. Like my granny always said, at least I had a home, and a family,

and my health. Well, most of my health. Unless I went near an animal.

But one day, the Doctor came back.

He talked to my dad for a long time, explaining something or other. I

couldn't hear what they said, but I could tell they were talking about me.

Finally, the Doctor came out to see me. He had a small box with him.

'Hello, Yarah,' he said. 'I've got a little present for you. I'm not really

supposed to do this, but I reckon this is a special case. Now, you have to

keep this a secret, okay? Can you do that for me?'

'Okay,' I said, shrugging. He handed the box to me. I opened it, and

inside was a glowing, pinkish ball of f l u f f , like cotton wool, but moving

around slowly. I took it out. It tickled, and felt like sunlight and jam mixed

together.

The Doctor crouched down to talk to me. This is an alien shapeshifting

pet, from a long way away. It's not from Earth, so there won't be any

problem with your allergies. You wanted a real pet, didn't you?'

I looked at the glowing pink fluff. 'Yes, but what sort of animal is it?'

'You tell me,' he said, his eyes twinkling.

I must have looked confused, because then he smiled, and it was such a

big, silly smile, it made me smile too. 'It takes the form of whatever animal

you want, anything, no matter how exotic. All you need to do is close your

eyes, and let it read your mind for a few moments. Then it will shape

itself

into whatever creature you want. Go on, give it a try.'

I closed my eyes and could feel the pink fluff washing over my mind.

I could see the pink glowing inside my head, very gently, reading my

thoughts, sensing my mood and seeking out my heart's desire.

I opened my eyes. The Doctor smiled again when he saw the animal my

mind had chosen. 'Are you sure?' he said.

'Yes,' I said. 'That's exactly what I wanted. What I've always wanted.'

'Good,' he said. 'I'm very glad to hear it Merry Christmas! Sorry it's a bit

late. But better late than never, that's what I always say.'

With that, he walked away quickly, around the corner, and was gone. I

never knew where he came from, or where he went. And I never saw him

again. But I never forgot his big, silly smile.

My name is Yarah de Silva. My puppy's name is Patch. He is black and

white, with a sort of pale patch on one side of his nose, and two white

paws, like socks. He has one wonky ear and one normal one. He is a bit

messy, a bit clumsy, and keeps sitting in his own water bowl by accident,

but he doesn't care cause he's having such a brilliant time just being

here.

He loves me, and I love him. And he's the most perfect puppy in the

whole, wide world.

Swedish Julafton, or Christmas Eve dinner, may be a smorgasbord, or buffet with Christmas ham, pickled pigs' feet, dried codfish, and many different kinds of sweets.

S w e d e n 1 0 7 0

Illumination

David Bailey

An adventure of the Eighth Doctor, with Izzy

'A fancy-dress party?'

'Not exactly. I didn't go, you see. I just, er, borrowed someone's outfit.'

'You stole it?'

'And I didn't know it was a fancy-dress costume at the time - I was a

little confused, to tell the truth. I just grabbed it from a locker and I've been

stuck with it ever since.'

Izzy tugged her wrists against the rough, thin twine, but it was no use.

More than that, it hurt. With a sigh, she looked back at the Doctor. 'So, it's

not really real clothes?'

The Doctor frowned slightly. 'I suppose not.'

'Then, aren't you freezing?'

She snuggled up against him a little harder, and he leant into her in

return, sharing their heat. They'd been abandoned here, in the animals'

pen, and left to cope with the cold. The wooden fence - just a few sturdy

branches jabbed into the ground and tied together with more of that

unforgivingly tough twine - was as good a place as any to rest her head for

a moment and do her best to relax.

The snow was falling more heavily now: bright chunks of white, about

the size of her fist, pattering down on the ground all around them, on

her and on the Doctor in his make-believe clothes. It was funny, but Izzy

had never before thought that snowfall could make a sound. A hissing,

whispering noise, like the sky was telling the ground to hush. The low pine

trees all around them were shelved with white. The snowstorm had been

growing steadily stronger since morning, and over the last few hours,

Izzy had heard an occasional soft thump somewhere off in the forest - a

tree branch resting its burden on the ground beneath it. In a muffled,

understated way, the forest in winter could be a surprisingly noisy place.

The Taiga, the Doctor had called it. There was a moment of confusion

before they had exited the TARDIS, when Izzy wondered how they could

have materialised inside a stripy big cat, but the Doctor had rattled through

some facts as they trudged through the knee-high drifts - a vast pine forest

circling the hem ofthe Arctic, it was the Earth's largest single ecosystem

(not counting anything underwater), bigger even than the rainforests

- and Izzy had soon caught up. 'When?' she'd asked, and he'd told her that

this was winter (well, duh), some time in the late nth century. The Doctor

had decided they'd spent too long on a series of warm planets and on a

trip to 25th-century Cortona (the town now floated above the

mountain),

and he was missing the cold. If that was the way it was going to be, Izzy

had said, she wanted snow. She'd joked about visiting Santa Claus, as

she'd known a couple of kids at school - an obnoxious brother and sister

who'd made no friends, so loved their parents' money more - who had

taken Christmas trips to Lapland to see some idiot dolled up in a red suit

and fake beard, sitting in a polyester teepee outside a five-star hotel. The

Doctor had smiled, said something about how Nicholas actually hated

visitors in real life, particularly children, and then said he had the perfect

destination in mind.

This was, it turned out, as near to Lapland as made no odds. There

were even reindeer - which were much smaller than they looked on

TV, the antlers of even the largest beasts barely troubling the less-than-

lofty heights of Izzy's shoulders. No red noses in sight, but they were

devastatingly cute nonetheless: their thick grey coats were surprisingly

soft, and they had big, black, innocent eyes and f l u f f y little white blobs for

tails as if they'd been crossed with rabbits. And, of course, the masses of

sparkly white snow laying around made it look like the TARDIS had landed

slap bang on the front of a Christmas card.

Izzy had always thought that strange multi-hued glitter that you saw

on cheap, gran-bought cards was pure tack. Turned out that, in the right

light, it was almost photorealism. As they'd walked through the edges

of the forest during the long, royal-blue twilight that passed for day at

this time of year, the sparse trees slowly gathering around them, the pale

moonlight behind them had been captured, reflected and refracted by a

million undisturbed snowflakes.

Splinters of white light, and purples and pinks and reds and blues, had

twinkled back at them as they stomped onwards. As the trees had grown

thicker, the light began to fade rapidly, and the twinkling had vanished.

The night had brought with it more than cold and darkness. It brought

the hunters.

The Doctor's sense of direction was never perfect, but Izzy had known,

from his constant lip-biting and dwindling supplies of Fun Facts About

The Arctic, that the lack of light and density of trees had conspired to get

them proper lost She was feeling the lack of his conversation - she always

found his wittering reassuring - and had been uneasy because of it, when

they'd been ambushed.

She and the Doctor had been lassoed (apparently, it did happen outside

of Westerns - the Doctor explained the hunters had probably refined

their astonishingly effective technique through wrangling reindeer), their

wrists and ankles bound together, and they'd been bundled onto the back

of a dogsled.

' T h i s isn't right,' muttered the Doctor as he was manhandled into his

restraints. He seemed more confused than scared. These people don't

hunt humans... '

Izzy could barely see anything - these hunters were working without

light, and suffering no handicap from it - but Izzy made a confident guess

on the dogsled thing based on two facts. Firstly, as they hit the wooden

slats of the sled, she heard a canine whimpering start up. Secondly, as

the sled shushed its way swiftly through the snow, she found herself

downwind of a number of unpleasant dog-farts.

The animals were silent as they dragged their sled through the forest.

Izzy had been laid on the sled, her head lying nearest the front, next to

the Doctor's feet. So, all she could see was the back of the sled-driver

(a hulking man, swathed in furs), the thin strip of the waning moon

flickering through the passing branches above her, and the Doctor's

leather shoes covering his sockless feet. (Izzy had wondered at that. Why

didn't he wear socks? Especially if he knew they were coming here? Was

there anything else he was wearing none of? In all the silent tension of

the

ride to the hunters' camp, the Doctor's clothes were all she could think

about - and that's how they later got on to the discussion of where he'd

got his absurd outfit. A fancy-dress party in San Francisco. Silly as it was,

Izzy supposed, given its provenance, she should be glad it wasn't yellow

feathers in his hair and a dress cut down to there.)

And then they'd found themselves at the camp: a scattered ring of

simple, conical tents, each about three times Izzy's height at their apex. A

few more of the hunters - all men, it seemed - wandered around, but only

one or two looked up to see the new arrivals. Their faces were covered,

wrapped in thick fur or leathers, or buried under hoods, with only a slit no

wider than her little finger to see through. Izzy would have liked to have

seen their faces. Why were they so bundled up? It was cold, sure, but not

bitterly so. Her face was numb, but she'd known winters in Stockbridge

that felt worse than this. And surely these men must be more used to the

cold than she was?

She and the Doctor had been bundled into one of the tents, a little

distance away from the centre of the camp, and plonked unceremoniously

next to a tired and worried-looking man whom the Doctor instantly

recognised as Adam of Bremen, some sort of historian. Adam had seemed

surprised to be recognised, his pudgy, pale face creasing as he bunched

together his bushy eyebrows, but the Doctor had made a point of blanking

him. The Doctor, in fact, seemed more put out about running into Adam

than he had about being kidnapped by the hunters. Izzy had shaken her

head and smiled; quietly, she'd whispered to the Doctor, 'What's so bad

about him?', but she'd got no reply. It was hardly the perfect dinner party

situation but, as the three of them sat awkwardly on the reindeer skins

inside the tent, shuffling occasionally to relieve the discomfort of their

bonds, Izzy found the silent tension almost unbearable.

Lacking anything more stimulating to do, Izzy peered through the gap

in the tent's flap, watching the deep blue of day turn to the black of night,

before finally drifting off into an uncomfortable, dreamless sleep. Then, in

the morning, they'd been woken by one of the hunters - Izzy still couldn't

see his face, as it was hidden in a thick, fur-lined hood - and dragged

towards the reindeer pen outside. The animals were fenced in with a

sturdy-looking barrier made from pine branches, and they'd snuffled their

complaints at having to share their home with three human interlopers.

One or two of them gave little barks - a coughing, grunting sound. A

larger one - the pack leader, Izzy supposed, if reindeer had such things

- butted one of its noisy fellows hard with its antlers, and a little scuffle

broke out. There was biting, Izzy was surprised to see, and one of the

reindeer started to bleed slowly from a wound on its flank.

Within seconds, the whole herd were spitting and barking at each other,

until one of the hunters stepped in and roughly separated them, leading

a couple of the worst troublemakers away. There was another grunt from

the hunter at their backs, followed by a sharp shove. They were marched

into the pen, their footsteps shortened and made unsteady by the ropes

around their ankles.

'I never knew reindeer could be so bolshy,' Izzy had gasped, shocked

and a little scared by the suddenly violent outburst.

'Oh, they fight,' the Doctor had said, the skin above his nose crinkling in

curiosity. 'But these ones should be thoroughly domesticated. An outbreak

of violence like that is very unusual. Very...' His voice trailed off as he

caught sight of a large, wooden hut on the far side of the enclosure, about

fifty yards away from the camp.

Its roof, made from lashed-together fans of green, bushy pine, slumped

under a thick weight of snow. A few of the hunters, all of them hidden

under wraps of fur and hide, wandered in, out and around the building,

rather conspicuously doing nothing in particular.

'At least that's one bit of good news,' the Doctor had said, unexpectedly

smiling, as they shuffled forward, it is here!'

Izzy had stopped for a second. 'Oh, well,' she crowed, 'I'm so glad you

found what you were looking for.' Then a sharp jab in her back from the

hunter had made her walk forward again, following the suddenly smiling

Doctor.

The building's mere presence taunted them throughout the rest of the

day, as they were forced to sit in the corner of the pen (well, two corners

- the Doctor refused to share any close proximity with this Adam chap)

and wait in the thickly falling snow. At least the hunters had given them

all some freedom: the binds around their feet had been removed, and only

one wrist was now tied, tightly to the wooden fence of the pen. It was after

a few hours of silent waiting that Izzy thought now was as good a time as

any to ask the Doctor about his clothes.

'I don't feel the cold like you do,' he said. 'Anyway, I've no time to

think

about the weather.' He nodded towards the large hut. 'I want to see if we

can get in there.'

Izzy was shivering now. She forced her words out through chattering

teeth: 'If it's any warmer than out here, so do I.'

Adam cleared his throat, and Izzy looked over to him. His eyes were wide

with terror, darting between his fellow prisoners and the hut. 'You can't

seriously be considering -'

'Oh, now, Adam of Bremen.' The Doctor practically spat the other man's

name. 'I know what you think of this place, but you've got it all wrong.'

'They are savages, the people who worship there,' Adam replied, trying

to keep his voice steady against his fear and the cold. 'The things they do,

the things I have seen... Unspeakable!'

Izzy looked at the Doctor. 'What do they do in there?'

He whispered his reply. 'They worship their gods.' Adam craned his

neck, hoping to catch what the Doctor was saying, but from the frustration

on his face, Izzy guessed he was having no luck. 'You know. Frey, Thor,

Baldur, that lot.'

'Thor?' Izzy asked, also lowering her voice. 'Red cape, winged helmet?

Big hammer?'

The Doctor sighed, and let out a little laugh. 'Remind me, when we're

out of this, to take you to visit Stan Lee.' The Doctor became serious again,

lowering his voice further. Izzy inched even closer to him. 'The Norse gods

are a little more rough and tumble than their comic-book personas. At

this point in history, people like Adam of Bremen have taken exception to

them and, in their effort to spread Christianity, are running something of a

smear campaign. In a few years, Adam writes a book about his experiences

in Scandinavia, claiming to have witnessed all sorts of bloody sacrifice in

the name of their gods. Animals, yes - but humans too, even children. It's

all nonsense, of course.'

Izzy looked around them, watching the gruff, silent hunters stamping

around the camp. 'Are you sure? I mean, why did they capture us and drag

us here?'

'I don't know yet - but I'm certain it's not to kill us. Adam's job was to

convince people that his God was a safer bet than the native religions of

the North. His basic methodology was to discredit the worshippers of the

old gods. It worked, too. His writings eroded the local belief systems and

paved the way for an influx of Christianity. Before long, nothing of the old

ways was left - short of a few scraps of shamanistic hoo-hah to impress

20th-century tourists. It's all a bit mean spirited. Not to mention badly

researched: when he wasn't lying outright, he gets some pretty basic facts

wrong.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, I'm going to bet that he thinks that -' he nodded at the hut'- is the

Temple of Uppsala. That's the place that Adam claimed was a centre for

human sacrifice. But we're hundreds of miles north of Uppsala here. He's

probably been working his way up into the more inhospitable countryside,

trying to find anything that will support his argument.'

The Doctor's voice had grown louder as his temper had got the better

of him, and Adam had overheard him. 'I assure you, sir, that everything

I feared about these barely human creatures has been proven true. They

have kept me here for more than a week, maybe two, dragging me out to

suffer this cold for the few hours of sunlight each day.' Adam's expression

hardened, and he stared straight at the Doctor, i have watched them drag

their women and their children into that temple of depravity every night.

I've heard the screams of pain and terror, and seen the men emerge with

blood on their hands and soaking their clothes.' Adam swallowed, his

fear returning. Tell me, then, what are these men doing if not practising

human sacrifice?'

The Doctor gazed at Adam, and Izzy could tell his mind was starting to

whirr. Maybe things were clearly more complicated than he'd assumed.

'Why haven't they killed you?' he asked.

'I beg your pardon?'

'You say they've kept you here for all that time, brought you into the

reindeer pen every day, made you watch as they've... done whatever they've

been doing. But they haven't killed you. More than that,' the Doctor added,

suddenly animated, 'if they have been killing their own families -'

'There can be no doubt of that,' Adam said firmly.

'Then why kill their own people instead of some outsider?'

The Doctor fell silent, gazing at the temple. Adam had no answer to give

him, and he retreated into his own worried contemplation.

This silence lasted just for a moment, until it was broken by a reindeer

snuffling up to Izzy, using its nose to push aside a small heap of snow by

her hip. It started to munch nosily on the pale plant it had exposed; or at

least, Izzy had assumed it was a plant. But as the reindeer rooted around in

the earth, its questing nose knocked against a bulbous, white growth - it

looked like one of the puffball mushrooms that grew in the woods around

Stockbridge. And just like those - and she'd whacked many of them with

a stick out of childish boredom, watching the spores inside explode in a

cloud of yellow - this one popped, spilling a small wisp of white dust into

the air and onto her jeans.

Snuffling louder, the reindeer licked at the spores. Izzy squirmed at the

wetness spreading through to her skin - it was warm now but when that

reindeer had had its fill, she knew it would move off, leaving its saliva to

chill and freeze in the cold air.

'Ick,' she grumbled. 'Shove off.' She shifted as best she could away from

the deer, managing to disturb it enough that it gave up, snuffling off to

find something else to eat.

It passed towards Adam, but he kicked out and warded the beast off.

Grimacing at the animal - and his situation, no doubt - Adam used his free

hand to reach inside his jerkin, bringing out a leather flask about as big

as a wine bottle. He flicked the stopper off with his thumb, and upended

the flask greedily into his mouth. With a gasp of relief, he brought it away

again, then wiped his mouth.

Seeing she was watching him, Adam held the flask out to Izzy and, with

a voice roughened by whatever liquid was inside, said, 'Bread-water?'

'Bread-water?' The scent of the drink wafted towards Izzy: it was a hot,

abrasive odour, and it reminded Izzy of something else.

'Distilled alcoholic drink,' the Doctor said over her shoulder. 'I wouldn't,

if I were you. The breweries here aren't exactly up to usual health-and-

safety standards.'

Adam shrugged, corked the flask and slipped it back into his jerkin. Izzy

sighed, tipping her head back to rest it on the wooden fence behind her.

Trust the local vicar to be a boozer - and trust the local booze to be too

dodgy to drink. She gazed at the shard of white moon in the darkening sky,

its edges troubled by a bank of thick grey cloud rolling in over the forest.

The sapphire blue that passed for daylight was slipping into the long black

night, but she had trouble finding any beauty in it now.

Izzy heard voices from behind her, and the footsteps of one of the

hunters as he approached the pen. He entered, then stood and stared

at them for a moment. He seemed to be examining them, but Izzy still

couldn't see his face. The lower part of it was wrapped in a thick muffler of

some sort of grey fur, which shimmered in the moonlight as it was caught

by the light breeze. His eyes were exposed, but they were too far in shadow

for Izzy to see them properly.

The hunter muttered something to himself as he walked slowly towards

Adam. He bent down over the man. Cowering, Adam turned his face away.

The hunter reached down, tugging Adam's leather jerkin open at the neck.

The priest gave a cry of shock, partly at the coldness of the air and partly

because the hunter was rubbing the blunt tip of his mitten over Adam's

skin, pulling it taut, examining it. There was a faint silvery sheen across

his collarbone. The hunter's fingers brushed across it, and the sheen

wiped away like greasy dust. He raised his fingers to the slit across his eyes

and stared at the tips for a moment before letting his hand fall again. The

hunter's shoulders slumped with what looked to Izzy like disappointment.

With a grunt, the hunter pulled back his hand, then grabbed Adam's

shoulders, dragging him to his feet. He shoved Adam forward, leading

him back to the tent where the prisoners slept.

'What was that about?' Izzy wondered.

The Doctor gazed after the men as they disappeared into the tent. 'He

was checking for something.'

'What, though?'

Before the Doctor could reply, the hunter returned and tugged at their

clothes, indicating they should stand. As they were marched back into the

tent, the Doctor's eyes were darting everywhere: the dark sky; the reindeer

grubbing in the snow; the temple.

Back in the tent, their wrists and ankles were bound up again, and Izzy had

another fitful night's sleep. She spent so much time awake that she could

only be certain she slept at all by the broken memories of dreams, dreams

of grey-furred men in a shining white landscape. When she'd woken for

the umpteenth time, she huffed noisily in annoyance, and hauled herself

over onto her side, in the hope of finding a more comfortable position.

'Ssh!'

She'd know that admonishing hiss anywhere.

Izzy sat up, pulling the deerskin sheets around her for warmth, and

looked to her side. In the dim light inside the tent, she saw the Doctor

sitting bolt upright, staring through the loosely flapping material over the

doorway.

'What is it?' she whispered.

'Look.'

Izzy stared at the thin sliver of land visible through the doorway of the

tent. Silver moonlight shone off the snow, spilling feebly into the tent. But

there was no sign of whatever the Doctor wanted her to see.

'There's nothing there.'

'Now look up,' the Doctor said.

He was being annoyingly cryptic, but at least this was better than trying

to sleep. Izzy did as he asked, seeing a jet-black circle of sky through the

hole at the top of the teepee. But still, nothing else.

'I'm sorry, Doctor, I don't...'

'What do you see outside?' he asked, turning to her. His eyes were

twinkling in the darkness, and Izzy saw the glimmer of a grin on his face.

'Snow, I guess.'

'Yes, and how are you seeing the snow?'

'How am I seeing it? With my eyes.'

'No, no, no. Come on, Izzy. Think.'

'Okay,' she said, shaking her head to wake herself some more. 'Okay, the

light of the moon reflecting off the snow?'

'Right. Now look up again. What can you see?'

She glanced again at the little circle of black above her. 'Nothing. No stars, nothing. I saw some cloud coming in earlier, I guess that... Oh.'

'Come on.' The Doctor stood and crossed to the doorway, pulling aside the flaps with a wide stretch of his arms. His free, untied arms.

'How did you...?'

'What, this?' he said, waggling his hands back at Izzy. 'Oh, I did that hours ago.'

Izzy glared at him, and hoped that he'd see her frustration in the darkness. 'Could you just pop over here and do the same for me, by any chance?'

Once he'd freed her, they stepped quietly out of the tent, careful not to disturb Adam. Outside, Izzy was greeted by a curious sight The sky above them was thick with cloud, a stretch of featureless black clamped over the top of the trees. The moon was nowhere to be seen, except the snow beneath their feet still glimmered and glowed with a faint blueish light.

The light stretched all around the camp and into the forest beyond it, gradually fading into darkness a few metres past the furthest tents. It lit the forest, the wrinkled bark was striped black-and-blue by the strange illumination, and the lowest branches of each tree were aglow. On the ground, the light was not a constant blanket: here and there, little circular patches of the blue light burned more strongly.

The Doctor quickly crossed to one of these brighter spots, while Izzy carefully stared into the darkness around them. The last thing she wanted was for them to be discovered by one of the hunters.

The Doctor knelt on the ground, dusting the snow aside. The exposed light burned almost as bright as a lightbulb, and Izzy had to briefly shield her eyes from it. A few seconds passed, then once she was used to the glare, Izzy was stunned to see that the light was emanating from one of the puffball-like fungi she'd seen the reindeer eating earlier that day.

'Should it be doing that?' she asked. 'I mean, I know some mushrooms glow in the dark and all that - but should it be glowing like that?'

The Doctor stroked his fingertip across the fungus, then rubbed the residue between his thumb and index finger. He sniffed it, then briefly dabbed it on to the tip of his tongue. He smacked his lips and grimaced.

This species normally behaves like this, yes. It lives in the darkest places in the universe,' he replied, it thrives on a total absence of light, blooming uncontrollably on planets so distant from their stars that there's no such thing as daylight. But not on Earth. This fungus doesn't belong here.'

'Alien mushrooms. Obviously.'

'It's a noxmycota, from... Vyre, if I remember rightly, in the Ellemede Galaxy.'

'Cool.'

'But how did it get here?' The Doctor stood and looked around. 'Aha!'

'Shush!' gasped Izzy. 'You'll wake everyone up!'

'No, no, no, I don't think so. They'll all be too far under the influence of

this,' he wagged his finger at the ground. 'Now, Izzy, look again.' He spun

around, his open arms taking in the whole circle of the camp.

'Have we got time for another one of your guessing games?'

The Doctor sighed. 'The ground beneath this camp is lower than

everything around it And look carefully: the fungus describes an almost

perfectly circular area.'

Izzy glanced at the trees standing at the very edge of *the* light, and saw

that the Doctor was right. The Doctor, meanwhile, was scrabbling deeper

into the snow. 'And there's this,' he said.

Izzy joined him, crouching down to peer at the exposed earth next to the

fungus. In the ground stood a small, smooth, black stump. Nervously, she

poked it, bringing her finger away to see a smudge of black, oily dust on

the tip. is that... charcoal?'

'Spot on,' the Doctor replied, grinning. 'Scorched earth. This, where

we're standing, is a crater. The fungus must have hitched a lift on a

meteorite and crash-landed here.'

'And the hunters,' Izzy said, 'they must have found it and... And what?

You said they were under the influence. Are they high?'

'In a manner of speaking, yes. Noxmycota has a curious affinity for

humanoid species. Its spores infect a host, rewiring their brain chemistry,

often sending them...' The Doctor stopped, staring at the temple. 'Oh. Oh,

dear. Adam of Bremen was right. Well, still wrong in some very important

ways, but right about what he's been seeing.'

'This fungus makes people kill each other?'

'Noxmycota infection has some severely mood-altering side effects,' the

Doctor said. The reindeer, the humans - they both show signs of it It can

increase its hosts' aggression, while loosening all sorts of inhibitions. If

the fungus is being used in the rites practised in that temple... '

'Hang on,' Izzy said. 'All sorts of whacked-out stuff gets used in

primitive religions on Earth, right? Mescaline, magic mushrooms -I even

knew a Wiccan once who swore by sage and lavender. It's all altered states

and that, but no one goes round killing each other.'

'But noxmycota is something different,' the Doctor replied. 'Humans

aren't able to cope well with the infection. It could be having all sorts of

effects, a simple but insidious life form like that getting mixed up with

the messy old human nervous system. That's it, that's it!' He sprang to his

feet. 'The fungus is affecting its hosts' behaviour, but some ofthe hunters'

tribe must have been immune - and those are the ones they fought against

and killed. Anyone new the tribe encounters - like us, or Adam - is put into

contact with the fungus to see if they are resistant too. That's what they

were looking for on his skin. That silver dust - it's starting to affect him.'

'Wait a minute!' Izzy gasped. 'I got some on my jeans. The reindeer

knocked one ofthe mushrooms and licked the spores off me. Am I...?'

'You're fine,' the Doctor said calmly. 'It takes more than a brief exposure

to be infected. It would take days, weeks even, for enough spores to be

inhaled or drawn in through the skin. But that's why they put us in the pen

every day - a constant exposure. All the fungus wants to do is grow. So all

its hosts want is to find more hosts. Leave potential new hosts out in the

snow, see if they get infected or not Give it time, of course,' he added.

'Don't just bump them o f f i n a day or two.'

The Doctor started to hurry off towards the temple, and Izzy scurried

along to catch up. As they strode through the snow, the Doctor said, 'The

noxmycota seems pretty entrenched here, if its got the hunters working

for it in such a complex fashion. We have to find a way to clear this tribe

ofthe fungal infection.'

'I'm guessing it's going to take more than yoghurt'

The Doctor stood with his back tight against the outside wall of the

temple, and Izzy did likewise, hoping that the darkness was enough to

hide them from anyone wandering by. The wall was built from a line of

thick pine trunks, standing on end, pushed into the ground. The branches

had been rather crudely hacked off, with little regard for making good, and

the knobbly wood hurt Izzy's back as she pressed against it But rather that

than human sacrifice.

'Can you hear anything?' she asked the Doctor.

'Something,' he whispered. 'Mumbling, chanting maybe? We're going

to have to get a closer look.'

He slid along the wall, feeling his way, until he found an opening. 'Are

you sure about this?' Izzy hissed, but he was already peering inside.

There was a moment where Izzy was sure she stopped breathing. She

could only hear the faintest noise from inside, a low, grumbling sound, and

she wasn't sure it was even human. But then, she wasn't sure the hunters

were exactly human any more. Why had she never seen their faces?

Finally, the Doctor slowly leant back again.

'Well?'

'Nothing,' the Doctor said, frustration weighing down his brow. 'It's

black as pitch in there, and if they are talking - if that's even the word -I

can't make any of it out.'

'I guess we just go inside and say hi, then.'

'Izzy, yes! That's a perfect idea!'

'I was joking.'

But the Doctor wasn't. They'd scooted away, towards one of the other tents

in the camp. Everything seemed deserted, Izzy guessing that the hunters

and their families (or what was left of them) were now gathered in the

temple. Inside the tent, they'd found a small cache of spare hunting furs,

and the Doctor had thrown a pile at her then started to swaddle himself.

Izzy curled her lip and cautiously sniffed a large, sheet of tatty, grey fur.

'I guess people pay more for minks because they poo roses,' she sighed.

Their way to the temple had been once more curiously easy. No hunters

wandered the camp, and everything was silent, save for the occasional

snuffle or bray from the reindeer. The Doctor barely paused at the door

of the temple, stopping only for a brief check of his surroundings before

slipping through the sheet of hide that passed for the building's door. Izzy

took a deep breath, squared her shoulders, and followed.

The darkness within swallowed any light from outside. Izzy looked at

her feet, and saw the faint glow from the fungus outside pale and peter out

just a foot or so into the building, scattering weak spiky shadows over the

rough dirt floor. Beyond that, there was nothing but a wall of night.

The temple was quiet, too. Whatever the Doctor heard before, there was

no echo of it now. Izzy could hear movement, though; it was obvious that

the hunters and whatever remained of their families were in here with

them. She could smell them, too: the stink of sweat, leather and fur. But

no one seemed to be reacting to her presence, or the Doctor's. The tang

of burnt wood still hung in the air, but it was an old smell, like the fire in

here had been extinguished hours ago, if not days.

In the darkness and the silence, Izzy had already lost the Doctor. She

looked down again, using the light from outside as an anchor to her

bearings - as long as she stayed near the door, she felt safe. She edged

slowly to one side, always looking at her feet, always keeping that light at

the corner of her vision. Still there were no signs of life: the hunters were

here, she could hear them breathing, but no one was moving. Maybe they

were asleep?

'Ow!'

Izzy froze.

'Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow.' The Doctor. Well, of course it was the Doctor.

There was a stony grunt from somewhere ahead of her - like she imagined a hibernating bear might sound if it was poked with a stick - then a mumbling, grumbling retreat back into silence. Whatever state the hunters were in, they seemed pretty hard to rouse from it.

After a few more seconds of nothing had passed, Izzy whispered, 'What the heck was that?'

'I stubbed my toe.'

They'd known each other a while now, so Izzy said nothing, safe in the knowledge that the Doctor would know precisely what expression she was wearing on her face.

'Of course, it would help if it wasn't so dark in here...'

Izzy wanted to scream at him to shut up, but now didn't really seem to be the time.

'Oh, Izzy,' the Doctor said, his voice fading to a whisper - and was that sadness she heard in it? 'The darkness.'

She was still afraid to speak, but curiosity was narrowing her options rapidly. 'What about it?' she whispered, it's night, there aren't any windows, of course it's dark in here.'

'We need to get out,' he suddenly hissed. 'Now.'

Izzy didn't need another prompt. Turning back, she found the strip of grey light by the door, and bolted for it. She burst into the cold air,

glad

at least to be out of the cloying atmosphere of the temple. The Doctor

tumbled after her, muttering 'no, no, no, no,' as he gazed at the glowing

earth around the camp. 'Oh, Izzy, you wanted Christmas, and I brought

you here.' He sounded beyond dejected. Guilty.

'We've been in worse spots than this,' she said, a little confused. 'The

hunters are out of it. Just untie the vicar, leave him to his own devices, and

let's be going.'

The Doctor tried to smile at her but failed catastrophically. Nothing

made Izzy more worried than when that happened. 'Midwinter's night,' he

said, 'here at the very edge of the Arctic Circle - nothing is more magical.

One day of total darkness, just one day without the sun.'

'And so the noxmycota...'

'It's going to bloom,' he said, his voice as dark as the night. 'Twenty-

four hours without any sunlight - even the weakest - is more than enough

to set it off. And it's all around the ground here, and riddled through the

nervous system of every one of those people in the temple... Of course!'

'What now?'

'That's why they're in there,' he said, excited now his brain was firing.

'Midwinter. Yule. They're celebrating.'

'Doesn't look like much of a party,' Izzy said. 'I mean, apart from the

mushrooms.'

'They're remembering,' the Doctor replied. 'Every year, the hunters

celebrate the one day of darkness in their temple. They must have done

it for years. And so it's practically automatic. Their will may have been

lost to the fungus, but there's still something of their tradition in there,

somewhere. So, they gather at the temple. They tell stories, they sing, they

chant - remember the chanting?' Izzy nodded, thinking it best not to say

that she hadn't really heard anything at all. Don't upset the Doctor when

he's theorising. 'And they wait out the night, as a community, as one.'

'That's a good thing, isn't it?' Izzy argued. 'I mean, keep them all in one

place. If the fungus... I don't know, what does it do, explode?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'Basically.'

'Well, it'll be contained.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'The spores would be released into the air.

Just the slightest breeze, and it could travel miles - and then it may never

stop. This isn't even the small hours on Midwinter's day. The fungus will

start to bloom in a few hours, and it'll just carry on until the sun returns,

spreading who knows where. And if it spreads northwards...'

'Further into the Arctic,' Izzy finished. 'More darkness, more time for it

to bloom. Chain reaction.'

'Precisely. The whole polar region could become its breeding ground.

Earth may never be free of it. Millions of square miles, dangerous and

uninhabitable.'

'So,' sighed Izzy. 'All we need to do is move the sun. Piece of cake.'

'Any light would do,' the Doctor said. 'Just enough to keep it in check for

a few hours. I get back to the TARDIS, mix up some fungicide, get some

drugs for the hunters.'

'You must have a torch in there?' Izzy asked. 'Maybe some floodlights?'

Her voice was getting a little squeaky with desperation. Floodlights? What

else did she think he had in there - 5,000 square yards of astroturf?

The Doctor was shaking his head. 'Even on one of the dogsleds, the

journey would take too long.' The journey's the problem, not the lack of

floodlights? Izzy was impressed. 'The fungus will start to reproduce soon,

and we can't take the risk.'

Izzy looked about her. The camp, still devoid of life, seemed equally

devoid of light. But she did see one thing: the heaps of unused firewood.

She patted her pockets. 'I've got Faye's lighter!'

'What?'

'She gave me this before she left, said she wouldn't have much use for

it any more. I guess quitting smoking gets easier when you merge with a

time-travelling entity.'

'Right.' The Doctor was glancing around, already up to speed with Izzy's

thinking. 'But we'll need a fire. If we can build one big enough, it won't

just arrest the bloom, it will send the fungus into a terminal decline. The

fungus can survive in normal daylight - especially the weak light here, so

far north - but a light close enough and bright enough would kill it off

completely, even in its hosts. So, it's got to be a big fire. And we need to

get it lit quickly.'

'Then we'll need a little help.'

'What do you mean?'

Adam had been less than keen to hand his hip-flask over but, under the

circumstances, it didn't take too long to persuade him. Izzy uncorked it

and sniffed. Vodka. A bit rough around the edges, but definitely vodka.

'Is this all you've got?' she asked.

Adam squinted at her for a second, and it was clear he was considering

not helping them. She couldn't blame him: the Doctor had been nothing

but rude to him since they met, and now they needed him. Adam let out

a long breath. 'I had half-a-dozen bottles, something like that, to give to

the natives. The hunters took them to one of their tents. But I don't know

which. They didn't exactly give me the grand tour as a welcome.'

The Doctor knelt down next to Adam, and stared at him for a few

seconds. Adam squirmed away uncomfortably, but his binds didn't let him

move far. 'I promise we'll get you out of here,' the Doctor said. 'But you

have to know: what you've seen here... It's not what you think it is.'

Adam stared back, a cold certainty replacing the nervousness in his face.

'They are savages. I know what I saw.'

'No,' the Doctor replied. 'You only know what you think you saw.'

Suddenly, Adam lunged forward, the momentum of his movement

causing him to pitch on to his knees. He eyes were wide, and Izzy noticed

that the pupils were wide and dark.

'Wrong! You're... wrong!' he spat, little gobbets of froth appearing at the

corners ofhis stretched lips. 'They're killers! Killers!'

The Doctor took a step back, out of the man's reach. He needn't have

worried - the twine holding Adam's wrists and feet together was strong,

and moving any closer to the Doctor was obviously out ofthe question.

'He's infected,' the Doctor sighed.

'Can we help him?'

'The same way we can help everyone else. Come on.'

Izzy searched the tents, while the Doctor set about building the fire.

By

the time she'd found the bottles - six, just like Adam had said - there was

an eight-foot cone of branches standing in the centre of the camp. The

Doctor stood back, brushing his hands together in satisfaction.

'I haven't built a bonfire that good since that weekend in the woods with

Baden Powell,' he said with a sigh.

'You might want to keep that one to yourself. Here,' she said, handing

him a bottle. 'Get pouring.'

It took them only a minute or so to douse the fire with the vodka, the

acrid smell of the spirit burning in the cold night air. Izzy slipped the

lighter from her pocket - a small rectangle of steel, glinting dully in the

glow from the ground. She popped open the top with a flick of her thumb,

and grinned as a bright blue spark ignited a chunk of orange flame.

'Oh, very deft,' the Doctor cooed approvingly. 'Very Steve McQuee-'

There was a soft thud, and the Doctor fell to his knees. Behind him, the

black bulk of a hunter loomed out of the shadows towards Izzy.

Panicking, she started to back away, but she found her way blocked by

another hunter. She wheeled around, the lighter still burning in her raised

hand. In the shadows of his hood, Izzy finally caught a glimpse of his

eyes. Dark pupils spread widely, only a razor-thin line of iris visible around

them. The Doctor was right - he was high as a kite.

Izzy was about to bolt for freedom, when she noticed that neither hunter

was making any further move on her. If anything, they were leaning away,

ever so slightly. She glimpsed the guttering orange flame in her hands,

hearing it sputter slightly in the breeze. Then she looked back at the

hunter, seeing the flame reflected in the black circles of his eyes. Eyes that,

she was sure, were squinting against the light.

She waved the lighter in front of her and, with a shocked grunt, the

hunter took two steps back. Izzy smiled.

'Gotcha,' she said. 'And if you think that was bright...'

She lowered her arm down to her right, down towards the fire.

The burst of brightness was like a thousand Christmas puddings lighting

at once. Izzy staggered away from the fire, but *the* hunters ran screaming.

Their cries alerted the rest of the tribe, who burst from the temple,

shielding their eyes from the blue flames. Izzy dashed back towards the

flames, just far enough to drag the Doctor to safety, and saw that the blue

of the flames was already being replaced by little orange blossoms as the

wood caught and started to burn on its own.

Soon, the fire took on a life of its own, the wood cracking and snapping

as the heat burst out of it. On the ground, the glow of the fungus died away

in a circle around *the* fire, fading away inch by inch.

One or two of the hunters were shaking their heads, pulling the furs

from their faces and rubbing their eyes. The infection was relinquishing its

hold on them already. Izzy knelt by the Doctor, as close to safety of the fire

as she dared, feeling warm for the first time since she'd left the TARDIS.

As the deep blue dawn broke on the day after Midwinter, the Doctor

finished his work. He'd dug up one of those backpack weedkiller-sprayer-

things from somewhere in the TARDIS (probably the room next door to

where he kept the floodlights, Izzy reckoned) and had sprayed the ground

all around the camp. He'd also passed a bottle of pink liquid around those

tribesmen who'd been conscious enough to accept it, persuading them

to drink some themselves then feed it to those who were still struggling

under the last of the fungus's influence. He'd made sure to give some to

Adam, who soon began to come his senses, too, and before long the tense

silence of the camp was replaced by the calm quiet of a normal night.

Izzy stood with Adam near the fire, which the two of them had kept

burning for over a day now. It crackled and blazed hotly in the glowing

twilight of the early morning. Summer-bright curls of flame twisted along

the taller pieces of wood, while the chunks of charcoal deep within it

glowed amber, pulsing out heat into the bitter air. Adam hadn't seemed

to enjoy scrabbling around for firewood, but Izzy had been pretty firm

in telling him how important the job was. They were both tired now, and

Adam had slumped to the floor, chewing on some of the dried reindeer

they'd found in one of the storage tents.

Izzy rubbed her eyes, which were sore with tiredness and wood-smoke.

She couldn't be sure, as the Doctor worked too quickly and didn't really

talk to her much while he did, but Izzy thought she saw him spend some

time talking with the eldest of the men, a grave and sorrowful look on his

face. Probably trying to help them come to terms with what they'd done.

Finally, he returned to the fireside, taking a deep breath.

'Everything okay?' she asked.

'It will be,' he said. 'In time. The whole tribe was here, gathered for

their Midwinter celebrations. Every year, they'd gather here from miles

around. No one would hunt or fish, the reindeer would be penned in.

No distractions, no interruptions, not a single person left out. Together,

they'd pray for the light to return. That automatic response saved them in

the end.'

'You mean we got everyone then?'

The Doctor nodded. 'They just have to come to terms with what

happened here. The noxmycota is dying now, so that's something.'

'Am I free to go, then?' Adam asked.

'Of course you are,' the Doctor said. 'These people won't try to stop you

now.'

Adam harrumphed. 'It's two days to the nearest town. There'll be plenty

of time for them to come after me.'

'You'll be fine,' the Doctor muttered. 'You'll make it safely back.'

Adam narrowed his eyes. 'How can you be so sure?'

'Tell me, Adam,' the Doctor said, taking a deep breath. 'Everything

you've seen here - you know why it happened.'

Adam's eyes narrowed further, a quizzical curl twisting his lips.

'Or, at least,' added the Doctor, 'you know that the sacrifices - all that

killing - wasn't the fault of the tribespeople. You know they were under an

external influence, an outside force that made them do those things.'

'I'm not sure I know what you -'

'Adam!' The Doctor barked his name. 'You felt it too. You lost control to

it - maybe not to the same degree, but you felt your own self slipping away.

You wanted to attack me in that tent. You wanted to hurt me. Didn't you?'

'I was tired. I was angry.'

'You were, very literally, not yourself. The things you are going to say

about these people, the things you are going to write...' The Doctor stared

into the fire. They are lies, Adam.'

A pause spread out to fill the cold air, the only sound the rumble of the

flames.

'Nothing changes,' the Doctor sighed as he stared into the fire, finally

breaking the silence, i save the world, and nothing changes.'

Adam got to his feet, brushing dusty snow from his clothes, i must

away.'

'Please,' the Doctor said, almost whispering. He turned his gaze to

Adam. 'Please, reconsider.'

Adam's reply was simple, grave. 'I have a job to do.'

There was more ice in that simple statement, Izzy thought, than the

whole of the Arctic.

Adam of Bremen pulled his jerkin tight around his neck and lifted his

knapsack from the ground. 'Good day,' he said stiffly. 'God speed to you

both.'

Christmas is a normal working day – but with a gala dinner in the afternoon. The dining hall assistants always wear Santa hats.

South Pole 2008

White on White

Kate Orman

An adventure of the First Doctor

- blue, sky blue, but a deep colour, very hard and clean. The sort of colour

that makes your ears ring. Not white at all. Deep blue, infinitely deep, as

though you could fall upwards into it and never stop falling.

How long have I been lying here?

Wait a minute. *How long have I* been lying here?

I leap up, panicked, and almost fall over. My boots crunch in the snow as

I try to get my balance. I'm tangled up in my harnesses. I unbuckle them,

awkwardly, twisting to get out of them.

Behind me: my sled's tipped over, but at least its contents haven't

spilled. Ahead of me: the power kite lies on the side of a small hill a little

distance away, pink, orange and green against the pure white. There's no

wind. I'm lucky. I don't fancy being dragged at random over unmapped

bits of Antarctic geography.

I'm incredibly lucky. I look at my watch: the last time I can remember

checking it was more than three hours ago. I was in full sail then, zipping

along behind the kite in a good strong wind, skis cutting through the

snow like a spoon through sorbet. I must have zoned out, gone off into

highway hypnosis with my brain in neutral and my body working like an

empty robot, and -

I was so panicked about my equipment that it's only now I notice it.

Dark blue. Oblong. Taller than me. There are some words in English

written on it, but I can't make any sense out of them. Navigational marker?

Emergency shelter?

I laugh out loud when I realise my tracks go right up to the thing, like

something out of a cartoon. It's like I was steering right for it.

... I *was* steering right for it, wasn't I? The only object in an empty white

landscape. Maybe some self-preservation instinct locked my hypnotised

brain onto it. My only chance of snapping myself out of it. Instead of which

I smacked right into it and knocked myself out. Nice one. I'm lucky I didn't

go down a crevasse.

Forget my schedule, that's all for today. I've got to warm up. I gather

in the late, right my sled and pitch my tent, next door to the container of

buried supplies or whatever it is.

I get a chicken curry and a litre of coffee into myself in between checking

gingerly for damage. I'm worried about the littlest toes on my left foot.

Other than that, I think may actually have got away with lying on snow

in -20 degrees weather for who knows how long. Thank God the wind

stopped. And that no storms came.

I have a little cry, then take out the satellite phone and call General

Belgrano station. My voice shakes as I tell the staff about my little

adventure. Do I want rescue? No I do not. A trek like this takes years to

organise, thousands of dollars in sponsorship. If I abandon it now, I may

never get another chance.

However, someone might want to come and take a look at the thing I

crashed into. Was it Father Christmas' sleigh, ask the staff? Ha, ha, no it

was not.

I think they think I imagined it. And yet, there it is just outside my tent,

humming to itself like a little electrical substation.

Oddly, it doesn't look that out of place. Antarctica has only two colours:

white, of course, and blue. In these December weeks, the sun - which

also looks white a lot of the time - never falls below the horizon. The sky

stays blue all day, light at the edges and darkening towards the zenith.

Sometimes there's blue ice, a deep chemical colour. Even the flame of my

little stove is blue. Everything else is white: snow, clouds, the moon.

It makes me think of a painting I saw once in New York: 'White on

White', by a Russian artist, Malevich. It's just a square canvas painted

white, with a second, smaller square inside it, also white - but not

quite

the same white - tipped over at an angle. The web page I read said it

was supposed to show a sort of pure mathematical ideal. None of your

bourgeois pictures of trees and mountains, this was art that anyone could

understand, or so Malevich thought. The museum's visitors were mostly

ignoring it. I found it hypnotic. (Aha, you think, no wonder she allowed

herself to be hypnotised by the snow.)

It put odd thoughts into my mind. If a man came here from another

planet, I thought, he wouldn't know what a tree was, but you could show

him 'White on White'. If Malevich was right, he'd be able to understand

that. Or at least, he'd be able to project his own thoughts onto it. I think a

painting like that, empty and without instructions, only has the meaning

you bring to it yourself. Perhaps Antarctica is the same.

The only other colour is the orange fabric of my parka and my tent and,

when the wind is blowing, the rainbow of my power-late.

I sleep like a crashed bus for eight hours, wearing an eyemask to keep out

the daylight that filters in through the tent walls. When I wake up, the blue

oblong is still there, humming away. Today the glare from the snow is the

worst I've ever seen; I can't even look out there without my goggles.

I grab the phone to make my morning call to Belgrano station. There's

no signal. It happens sometimes. I pull out the HF radio and try that

There's no answer.

I keep trying the radio for 15 minutes, then start changing channels,

in the hope of catching someone's conversation. If there's a problem at

Belgrano, perhaps someone could pass on a message for me? I try calling

the Pole, much closer now than Belgrano. Nothing. Finally, I try the

emergency channel. Someone must be listening to that But all I find, up and

down the dial, is silence.

I jump up and dash outside and turn around and around, staring into

the horizons. I hold my breath and bang my hands together and the panic

passes after a moment. It's just the shock of your funny turn yesterday,

catching up with you, I tell myself. It's only the weather being unhelpful.

Try again later in the day and someone will answer.

My GPS receiver isn't working, either. The panic wants to rise up again.

I grit my teeth. Think!

A solar flare? That could knock out the radio for days. Satellite phone

and GPS, too.

The weather's clear and still, so losing the sat nav is not a crisis. I can

navigate by using the sun and my watch. I'm only a day or two out from the

Pole now; I'll be there for Christmas, just as planned. The sponsors will be

overjoyed. Not as overjoyed as me, though.

My breakfast is porridge, clammy with melted butter, made with the

help of handfuls of melted snow. (Back home, my mother will be getting

ready for a huge family barbeque on Christmas Eve. I try not to think about

her cooking.) Then it's pack up the sled, harness it to my torso, and head

on out.

I've been dragging the sled for weeks. I actually feel a bit odd without

the weight of it pulling on my back. It gets a little lighter each day as I use

up food and fuel. I've still grown to hate the thing with a passion. I'm just

glad I didn't do something insane during yesterday's fugue, like leaving it

behind. It makes my stomach turn, just thinking about it Or maybe it's

all that butter.

The wind is still quiet, so I'll be walking for a while. The glare is

unbelievable today. I'm squinting even through my anti-UV goggles.

All this space, and it was claustrophobia that struck me. I had to get out

of that tent

There are a lot of reasons I'm out here by myself. To prove I can do it,

obviously, without anyone's help. To avoid the nightmare that teams go

through as their body chemistry changes and they grow to blame and

loathe each other. Ha, ha. I've got nobody to blame but myself.

It's not just that, though. I like being alone. I prefer to be alone. I've been

climbing mountains solo for almost ten years.

... not quite this alone, though, cut off from contact At home, in my tiny

flat, I still talk to the world in email and phone calls. But this is the danger

of the phone and the radio - that you will think you are not alone.

I don't feel lonely out here, even now. There's a presence... call it God,

call it my mind trying to fill in the blanks.

That's the thing that worries me the most: that my brain will begin

to populate this blank sheet of paper with places and people that don't

exist.

I hear the plane before I see it, but only a moment before - then it's

above me, flattening the world with its sonic boom, iBLAM! iBLAM!, and

vanishing to the horizon.

I nearly break my neck trying to catch sight of the thing, and then there's

another one - pursuing the first? iKA-BLAM! iKA-BLAM! And it's gone

too.

... <Que demonios? Those must have been military planes, fighter planes.

Where did they come from? From the Pole? There are no planes like that

here, only the heavy lifters that bring people and supplies from the

real

world, and the light planes for emergencies.

There's still nothing on sat phone or HF. I feel like I do in dreams when I

see something out of the corner of my eye, but I can't turn my head. I think

that something huge is happening, and I'm only seeing tiny clues. Is there

a war taking place, just outside my vision, just outside my hearing?

There's no scale in this landscape. When something does come over the

horizon to break up the blankness, you can't work out how big it is or how

far away it is. I suppose, after my little adventure with the blue container,

I'm half keeping an eye out. So I see the fluorescent pink thing as soon as

it comes over my horizon, but it's a few hours before I'm close enough to

see how enormous it is. It must be as large as a jumbo jet, but sticking up

out of the ground at an angle, taller than it is wide.

I slow and stop and unclip myself from the sled harness, and take a few

steps towards the thing. The violent pink colour is hard to look at -I can't

work out what I'm seeing. Curves and joints, but folded and crumpled.

I can see raw metal where parts of the object have been torn. I think it

must have fallen from the sky. A crashed craft, but one with all sorts of

attachments, like legs.

It looks a little like a crumpled hand. I've never seen anything like it.

The panic has come back, gnawing at my guts and my extremities, and

it's not going to go away this time. What if the world has ended, and I'm

the only one left? No problem, I'd be dead soon anyway, without anyone to

haul in supplies. Here you only have what you bring with you.

What can I do, except keep going?

I harness myself to the sled. Slow, steady walk. I sing as I walk, pop

songs mostly, just to keep up the rhythm, keep myself going. There's still

no wind. Don't look back.

The South Pole is so close now. At Snowcap Base I'll have a hot shower,

and someone will look at my frostnipped toes, and I'll eat freshly cooked

food, and drink champagne to celebrate Christmas. Or beer. Or whatever

they have there, I don't mind. I'll phone my mother and father and tease

them that I'm having a real Christmas, with plenty of snow.

I hear a low, deep sound, somewhere in the distance. I stop, trying not

to rustle and pant, listening hard. An engine?

Another! And another! That's not the steady drone of an aeroplane,

those are explosions!

The sky turns black.

It's night.

The darkness travelled suddenly from one horizon to another, bringing

a billion crisp stars - but the sun is still there!

I scream and scream again. My body and brain reject this impossibility,

this nightmare: I fall down, onto my knees in the snow. I grab at my

goggles, but some instinct warns me against exposing my eyes to the

killing brilliance at the western horizon.

In the next instant, the aurora australis fills the sky. The colours are

so beautiful, so vivid, so soothing, that my screaming turns to laughter,

desperate tearful gulps. I lie there on my back, watching the great sheets

of yellow and green wave like flags. They're edged with orange, with red,

with purple.

I'm dying, aren't I? Perhaps the whole world is dying and I'm watching it

go. The only thing I can think is, no, not yet, let me get to the Pole first!

As quickly as the impossible night fell, the daylight comes again, the

clear blue erasing the gorgeous rainbow of the aurora. I'm still breathing.

The air is still there, the sky is back again.

My goggles are full of the hoar of frozen tears, half-blinding me. I have

to take them off and clean them out. My fingers find a long, painful line

on my face, the tiny exposed bit of skin, sunburned so badly it's already

blistering.

I want to call my mother and father. Sat phone still can't get a signal. I

fire up the radio and clutch the mike with shaking fingers. 'Snowcap,

Snowcap, Snowcap, this is Martinez, come in.' I repeat it like a mantra,

three times, four times. Please, God, let someone hear me.

'Now, who can that be? Who is that, hmm?'

I'm so overjoyed to hear another voice that I nearly drop the radio.

'Snowcap, is that you? This is Sari Martinez.' I'm laughing, crying,

snivelling like a little girl. 'What - what just happened?'

'Gracious me. What are you doing out there, young lady?'

Who is this guy? 'Martinez. Making a solo trek from General Belgrano

Station to the Pole. Don't joke around, Snowcap, you're expecting me.'

'Oh, I see, I see... in the haste of the evacuation, you were overlooked,

weren't you? Oh dear, what a nuisance. What are we going to do about

you, hmm?'

I say weakly, is there anyone else there I can talk to?'

He actually chuckles. 'I'm afraid not. Everyone else has been

evacuated!'

Evacuated? iMiechica! 'I saw a crashed craft... I heard explosions... and

then... what happened to the sky?'

'All of it is my fault, I'm afraid. You see, some people called the Gelidons

tried to destroy the part of the Earth's atmosphere that screens out the

sun's harmful radiation.'

Gelidons? Who? Terrorists or something? 'Do you mean the ozone

layer?'

'Yes, exactly. Exactly. They thought no one would detect their work,

because it would be blamed on human pollution.'

Talking to this rayardo is like doing a jigsaw with half the pieces missing.

'You're talking about the ozone hole.'

'Yes indeed! Very good! They intended to expand that hole to cover half of

the Earth's surface. The entire Southern Hemisphere would have become

uninhabitable! For human beings, at any rate. The Gelidons themselves

would have been perfectly comfortable.'

I put the mike down on top of the radio and close my eyes. The world

goes almost silent for a moment; just the soft crackling in front of me and

the plasticky rustle of my jacket.

I'm hallucinating. Starved for sights and sounds, my mind is filling

them in, like a painter filling a blank canvas.

Am I?

The voice crackles out of the radio again. 'Are you still there, er, Miss

Martinez?'

I pick up the mike. 'What's a Gelidon?'

'An alien being,' he answers straight away. 'A visitor from another galaxy.

Something like an enormous many-coloured lobster with immense eyes.'

!<Uno extraterrestre?! Well, of course it would be... wait, did he say a lobster? I think of the crashed thing and its joints and legs.

'I saw a UFO,' I tell him. 'Crashed in the snow.'

'Ah yes, that will be the work of my friend Steven. He borrowed one of the Gelidons' spacecraft' He chuckles again. It gives me the creeps. 'He's been causing them a great deal of trouble. Keeping them distracted!'

Was that what I saw earlier? Not military planes, but two UFOs in a dogfight?

'My dear, what are we going to do about y o u ? '

'Look, I'm only a few hours walk from you, Snowcap. I'll keep coming.'

'No, no! For one thing, Miss Martinez, I'm not at the Snowcap Base. And for another, it's not safe.'

Wait, what? 'You're not at the Pole? Where are you, then?'

'My vehicle was damaged in an explosion. I was making my way back to the base, but this caterpillar thing seems to have run out of fuel.'

I get it 'You missed the evacuation.' My God. 'Are you on your own?'

'I'm afraid so. The Gelidons made an attack on the base just as everyone was getting onto the plane. They were forced to leave at once.'

My mouth goes dry. 'These Gelidons are at Snowcap Base?'

'Not any more. They're trying to repair their machinery, for all the

good

that will do them.'

'But what if they hear our radio transmissions?'

'The Gelidons don't play around with anything as primitive as radio,'

he scoffs.

'No, wait - what do I do if they find me?'

'You don't pose any threat to the Gelidons, do you?' He sounds amused

again, as though this is all a fantastic joke, and we're not stranded in a

frozen desert. 'Ifyou leave them alone I'm sure they will leave you alone.'

It suddenly hits me - 'What will happen if they find you?'

'Well, I don't think they'll be very pleased to see me,' he admits.

With no fuel, there's nothing he can do but sit there. He can't even get

out and walk to the base, not if it's full of space lobsters. He's a *bianco facil*

A sitting duck.

'Oh, that's not fair,' I whisper. 'That's not fair.'

I've been heading to the South Pole for two whole months. Even without

the wind, I can be at Snowcap in less than a day.

No, the journey didn't really start when I trudged away from Belgrano.

It started almost two years before that, when I began to plan, look for

sponsors. No, it started years before that, the first time I saw photographs

of grinning people standing on the bottom of the world where the sun

doesn't set but bounces back slowly from the horizon and I knew I must

go there too. I was seven.

And now this hallucination, this madness, so close to the finish line. I

can't stop now, it's impossible.

I grab the mike and the words just tumble out in a shriek. 'Leave me

alone! Just - just - leave me alone!'

'Calm down, young lady. Panicking isn't going to do anyone any good.'

I suck in a deep breath. 'Who *are* you?'

'I am the Doctor,' he tells me. 'Now, you listen to me. I have sabotaged

the Gelidons' ozone conversion machines and put an end to their scheme.

Soon they'll realise there's nothing left for them to do but get into their

remaining spacecraft and leave the Earth. In the meantime, all we can do

is be patient.'

It's at this moment I have to make a decision. Do I accept what I'm

hearing and seeing?

My mother always says: what's the worst that can happen? If I'm wrong,

if it is all true but I ignore it, I'm leaving someone stranded and helpless in

this emptiness. Someone just as alone as I am.

'Have you got sat nav?' I ask him.

'Let me see now, that would be this device... yes.' He gives me his

position. I find and mark it on the map, to the northwest.. I'm actually

closer to him than I am to the Pole.

'Sit tight,' I tell him. 'I'm going to come to you.'

There's nothing to do but think as I trudge across the snow, dragging my

sled over frozen ripples in the snow.

I think about the sky. The Gelidons did that, I think, made the

atmosphere turn transparent. But when I think it through, I realise that the

explosions I heard were the sabotage. The Gelidons' machines had been

working for hours, chewing away at the sky, causing that terrible glare,

interfering with radio transmissions. When the Doctor blew the machines

up, the air repaired itself.

The Doctor made night fall in the middle of the Antarctic summer. What

else could he do? Bring down the moon, like a scoop of ice cream? Do I

really want to go anywhere near this guy?

A slow wind is just beginning to rise, lifting snowflakes, like smoke

waving over the ground. Shouldn't there be terrible storms, or something?

It's as though nothing happened at all. How much of the globe did that

awful black sky cover - were we the only witnesses, he and I? I'll have to

ask him about the science. But I have a feeling I won't understand it.

Get to the Doctor before the Gelidons do, that's my entire plan. What

will we do after that? I have no idea.

I can't believe I've turned around. I've actually turned my back on the

South Pole and I'm walking away from it.

Slow, steady walk. Don't look back.

A few hours later, squinting through a pair of binoculars, I see my first

aliens. I don't even blink. I'm getting used to miracles.

There are two of them. They do look a bit like lobsters. A little bit. Their

bodies are long and flat, with many legs - a great many legs at the front,

or perhaps those are mouth parts. I don't know anything about animals.

I know that they look wrong, though, they move wrongly. It makes my

stomach turn again.

Their backs and the sides of their legs are the same ugly bright pink as

the crashed craft. Perhaps they're wearing armour. Or possibly they've

painted their shells that colour? Not as camouflage, but for the same

reason my own parka is a livid orange - so they can find each other in the

snow?

When I can stop gazing at the aliens themselves, I look at the snow

beneath them, I see what they're doing. They're following the tracks of the

Doctor's vehicle!

My first thought is to grab the radio and warn him. But I think my

adrenal glands have given up by now, I'm not capable of panic any more.

Instead I take out the map.

But it's not easy to work out how far away the Gelidons are, nor how

fast

they're moving. Scale is hard enough to judge in this featureless world,

and I don't even know how big they are. I make the best guess I can by the

size of the tracks and put my finger on the map where I think they are.

They and I are both still kilometres southwest of the Doctor's position.

Which means that they're following his outbound tracks, which are

heading northeast Which means he took a different route on the way

back. That means they've got to follow the tracks all the way out to the

machine, then turn around and follow the inbound tracks. Whereas I can

go as the crow flies, straight there.

'Race you,' I say out loud.

I have to chance it that the Gelidons are so intent on the tracks that they

won't see me. I could travel much more quickly with the power-kite, but

I'd also be extremely conspicuous.

I don't sing. Just in case, somehow, they can hear me.

Two hours later I catch sight of the Doctor.

He's standing on top of a snowcat, scanning the horizon with his own

pair of binoculars. He's a tiny, white-haired figure, leaning into the wind.

He's not wearing much gear - a kneelength white jacket, and nothing else

that I can see, no balaclava, not even gloves.

He must be freezing, and he ought to be terrified. He doesn't even look

nervous. He stands upright and still, dignified as a statue.

He sees me. He gives me little encouraging 'come here' waves, as

though I was planning on going somewhere else. I wave back and trudge

a little faster.

The Doctor's seen something else through those binocs - it can only

be the Gelidons, coming in from the northwest. He gives me some 'hurry

up' waves, and starts clambering down the luminous orange body of the

snowcat.

I can see them! They're moving fast, clambering through the snow,

sending up a spray to either side.

I stop a hundred metres from the vehicle's caterpillar tracks and run

for the sled, not even bothering to unharness myself, trying not to get too

tangled.

The Doctor shuffles towards me through the snow, muttering to

himself. 'Dear, dear, dear.'

There's no time for good manners. 'Jump on,' I shout. 'Jump on the sled

and hold tight.'

He doesn't waste time, just clambers on top of my equipment with

surprising agility and grabs hold of the tarpaulin. I glimpse a sharp face

with brilliant eyes. I can't work out how old he is - somewhere between

fifty and seventy? Thank goodness there's not much weight on him. I can't

believe how little he's wearing, but all my questions will have to wait.

'Look out!' he shouts.

The snowcat rocks as one of the Gelidons leaps on top of it. It's got eyes

like twin moons. It hisses, a terrible electric sound, waving a single giant

claw. It brings it down, smashing the windscreen. The other's coming

round the back of the stranded vehicle in a waving motion of angry legs.

I get the power-kite untied and throw it at the sky, not bothering with

the harness. Instantly it catches that beautiful wind. There's a hard jerk as

the kite pulls us forward.

A Gelidon leaps into the spot where the sled was a moment ago. I

scream, clinging to the kite's handle as though my life depends on it,

because it does. Both our lives.

I make myself turn my head away, focus on what's ahead and not what's

behind us. The alien monsters run after us, but they can't run as fast as

the wind can blow. I look back at the Doctor, who's hooting with laughter,

sitting up on the sled. I can't help catching his laugh as the kite catches

the wind and we speed across the snow, leaving the Gelidons behind,

uselessly clacking their claws.

'Now this is the way to travel!' he calls out.

'Buemsimo!' I shout back. 'But Doctor, where do we go now?'

It's pure white, white on white - the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the old-

fashioned computer in the centre. I stand on the threshold, gaping at it.

The Doctor's outside, radioing his friends with our coordinates so they

can come and pick us up. At this moment, I'm alone in his ship. My God

- it's warm in here! I start tugging at my gloves.

The only thing I can think is that the bulk of the craft was buried in the

snow, and the blue box was just the entrance sticking up. But that's not

true, is it? This thing's bigger on the inside.

I did not make it to the South Pole, and maybe I never will. I did not help

to save the world. But at least I saved the life of one man. And now I'm

seeing a miracle. Another miracle.

Nothing seems impossible any more.

About the Authors

BEV ALLEN is old enough to have watched the very first episode of Doctor

Who as it was first broadcast. Although she's been writing since she was a

child, it wasn't until her own children had grown up and she found she'd

more time on her hands than could be filled by making another quilt,

that she gave it any serious attention. Several novels aimed at the teenage

market resulted and languish in the depths of her computer. A short

story published in SFX Pulp Fiction 2007 led to this chance to write a Doctor

Who story. There may possibly be things more fun than writing about the

Doctor, but Bev can't think of them.

JASON A R N O P P is a freelance screenwriter, novelist and journalist.

'Christmas Every Day' is his first piece of official Doctor Who fiction, so he's

frankly delighted. Prior to this lofty peak, he wrote the short film Look At

Me, as well as forthcoming features The Accidental Serial Killer and Blood Red

Sky. 2005 saw the release of his New Line-licensed novel Friday The 13th:

Hate-Kill-Repeat, which enjoyed a splendidly high body count. Arnopp also

writes for such magazines as heat, Doctor Who Magazine, The Word,

SFX and

Bizarre. He runs online screenwriting journal Bloggery-Pokery and lives in

Camden Town, London, with over 2,000 movies and an arcade machine.

DAVID BAILEY has dabbled often within the worlds of Doctor Who and

Bernice Summerfield for Big Finish. He swore he'd never do it again,

but he's rubbish with promises. David lives in San Francisco (across the

Bay from the best Christmas decorations shop he has ever seen) and is

working on a novel, which he promises to finish soon.

J O H N BINNS has edited four volumes of Short Trips for Big Finish - A

Universe of Terrors, Steel Skies, Life Science and 2040 - and has written stories

for several others, as well as for the Bernice Summerfield anthologies Life

During Wartime and Missing Adventures. 'Planet of the Elves' is his second

light-hearted romp. He works as a criminal defence lawyer in London.

JOFF B R O W N is a magazine editor working in London. As well as three

Short Trips stories, J o f f has written three kids' books and is working on a

fourth. This is his first story to feature kung fu, though.

A N D R E W CARTMEL was script editor on Doctor Who for three seasons

during the Sylvester McCoy era. He was senior script editor on Casualty

and script editor and lead writer on Dark Knight for Channel Five. He is

currently writing for Torchu;ood. He has had plays produced on the London

Fringe and a number of novels published including Warhead, The Wise and,

most recently, Miss Freedom.

XANNA EVE C H O W N (editor) is a writer and editor who recently moved

to Brighton and can see the sea from her front door. She has worked on

a variety of projects from the Harry Potter chess magazine to scripts for a

talking pen - voiced by Grover from Sesame Street. She has written six stories

for Big Finish and is currently the range editor for the Short Trips series.

DAVID CROMARTY graduated from Bath Spa University with a degree in

Creative Writing and Drama Studies in 2007. His first professional fiction

was published in the Bernice Summerfield anthology Something Changed.

LAURENCE DONAGHY would have to go spelunking to get down to Cloud

Nine at having his name in print for the first time ever, all the more so as it's

attached to Doctor Who, the greatest toybox for authors ever invented. He's

a happily engaged dad-of-two and civil servant whose time spent filling in

risk registers and completing progress updates is periodically interrupted

by alien invasions, time travelling and dimension hopping; although

sadly, not as often as he would like. Until now the pinnacles of his writing

career were online reviews of his fanfics, particularly the warm reception

afforded to his Spider-Man 3 and Superman Returns II screenplays and the

(obvious in retrospect) Lost/Scrubs, Doctor Who/Balamory crossovers.

IAN FARRINGTON has edited five Short Trips collections - Past Tense,

Monsters, A Day in the Life, The Centenarian and Defining Patterns - and was the

range editor of the series for its first 22 anthologies. He has written for

many Short Trips and *Bernice* Summerfield books, co-produced Big Finish's

UNIT audio series, and was the assistant producer of the company's Doctor

Who audio ranges from 2002 until 2006. He has also contributed to Doctor

Who Magazine and is currently the sub-editor of All About Soap.

MATTHEW GRIFFITHS reckons that this is his six-and-a-halfth Short Trip.

Although his poems have appeared in a number of magazines and his feet

on several London amateur theatres' stages, his secret passion is editing a

journal of town planning, to which he devotes most ofhis days.

SIMON GUERRIER is the author of the Doctor Who novels The Time

Travellers,

featuring the First Doctor, and The Pirate Loop, featuring the Tenth

Doctor. He's written numerous short stories and ten audio plays for Big

Finish Productions (including the seventh Doctor's meeting with Oliver

Cromwell) as well as an episode of the new Blake's 7. He's also the editor

of *How* The *Doctor Changed My* Life, a collection of 25 short stories all by first-time authors, published in September 2008. He lives in London with

a bright wife and a dim cat.

REBECCA LEVENE has been a writer and editor for fifteen years. She's

written a children's book about Captain Cook, several science fiction and

horror novels and a Beginner's Guide to Poker. She was associate producer on

the ITV1 drama Wild at Heart, story consultant on the Chinese soap opera

Joy Luck Street, scriptwriter on Family *Affairs* and Is Harry on the Boat? and part ofthe writing team for Channel 5's Swinging.

LISA MILES is a children's writer and editor who has worked on many

books and magazines featuring characters from the world of film and TV.

This is her first trip into the universe of Doctor Who and she has loved every

bit of the time-travelling experience! She lives in Tunbridge Wells with her

husband and young daughter.

JAMES MORAN wrote The Fires of Pompeii for Series Four of Doctor

Who,

Sleeper for Torchwood Series Two, and the British horror movie Severance.

He is currently working on episodes for Torchwood Series Three, Primeval

Series Three, the UK version of Law & Order, Crusoe and Spooks, as well as

the new Spooks spin-off, Code 9. His typing fingers are currently resting in

a bucket of ice.

KATE ORMAN lives in Sydney, Australia, with her husband and collaborator

Jonathan Blum. Best known for her numerous Doctor Who novels, Kate is

currently working on several original SF projects.

A N D R E W PIDOUX lives in White City in London, a stone's throw from

the BBC. He has published poetry in anthologies and magazines and

received an Eric Gregory Award from the Society of Authors. He has work

forthcoming in Stand, Poetry Wales and Envoi.

WILLIAM POTTER has been writing and drawing comics since school.

When he's not putting words into the mouths of SpongeBob SquarePants,

Shrek, Captain Scarlet and Ninja Turtles, he plays bass in reformed Top 30

indie band CUD and gets about a bit. This is his first foray into dimensions

in time and space.

EDDIE ROBSON is the author of several Doctor Who plays for Big Finish,

including Memory Lane, Human Resources, The Condemned, Grand Theft Cosmos,

The Raincloud Man and Masters of War, and is the producer of the Bernice

Summerfield range of audios. He has also written books on the Coen

brothers and film noir, comedy for Radio 4's Look Away Now and BBC7's

Tilt, and pieces for numerous magazines.

JJ S E C K E R should need no introduction. Educated in a Trappist Monastery

in Surbiton, with a 3-year vow of silence broken by a torrid affair with a

nymphomaniac Cabinet Minister, leading to years of struggle with alcohol

until an unexpected cure whilst smuggling silk into Tibet by yak: this is

the ideal background for a prolific and world-famous author. Alas, none

of these actually happened to JJ Seeker, making an introduction essential.

Film scripts include Time Frame (which won silver in the Torbay Agatha

Christie Centenary Film Festival) and The Best Place for Joe. Plays include

Pilgrimmorality and Crackers; and his latest Murder at the Minack. His book on

original Patience games, A Fistful of Patience, will be out before Christmas.

His last project was the quirky but beautifully illustrated card game

Snark!

based on the poem by Lewis Carroll: this is an essential for the point one

percent of the population who has read the poem and incomprehensible

to everyone else. Ah! If only there had been Tibetan yaks.

GARETH W I G M O R E frittered away his youth writing fanzines and fiction

when he should have been chasing girls and playing cricket. He's spent

the past ten years in London, where he messes around with words for a

living.